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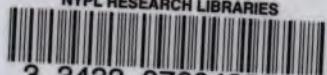
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THE ANNES

Marion Ames Taggart



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**THE ANNES**

## *Books by Marion Ames Taggart*

<p>           AT AUNT ANNA'S            BETH OF OLD CHILTON            BETH'S OLD HOME            BETH'S WONDER-WINTER            BETTY GASTON THE              SEVENTH GIRL            BLISSYLVANIA   POST-              OFFICE            BY BRANSCOME RIVER            CAPTAIN SYLVIA            DADDY'S DAUGHTERS            DAUGHTERS OF THE              LITTLE GREY HOUSE            DOCTOR'S LITTLE GIRL            ELDER MISS AINS-              BOROUGH            FRIENDLY LITTLE HOUSE              AND OTHER STORIES            HER DAUGHTER JEAN            HOLLYHOCK HOUSE            IN THE DAYS OF KING              HAL            JACK HILDRETH AMONG              THE INDIANS            JACK HILDRETH ON THE              NILE            LITTLE AUNT            LITTLE GREY HOUSE            LITTLE WOMEN CLUB            LOYAL BLUE AND ROYAL              SCARLET            MISS LOCHINVAR            MISS LOCHINVAR'S RE-              TURN         </p>	<p>           NANCY AND THE COGGS              TWINs            NANCY PORTER'S OPPOR-              TUNITY            NANCY, THE DOCTOR'S              LITTLE PARTNER            NUT-BROWN JOAN            ONE AFTERNOON AND              OTHER STORIES            PILGRIM MAID, A STORY              OF PLYMOUTH COLONY              IN 1620            PUSSY-CAT TOWN            SIX GIRLS AND BETTY            SIX GIRLS AND BOB            SIX GIRLS AND THE              SEVENTH ONE            SIX GIRLS AND THE TEA              ROOM            SIX GIRLS GROWING              OLDER            SIX GIRLS GROWN UP            SWEET NANCY            THE ANNES            THREE GIRLS AND ES-              PECIALLY ONE            TREASURE OF NUGGET              MOUNTAIN            UNRAVELING OF A              TANGLE            WINNETOU            WYNDHAM GIRLS         </p>
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*"Before she could gather herself together . . . Anne felt little Anne's arms clinging around her waist, and looked down into the shining eyes of the child."*

# *The* ANNES

BY  
MARION AMES TAGGART

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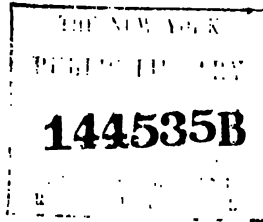
FRONTISPIECE

BY  
W. C. NIMS

GARDEN CITY, N. Y., AND TORONTO  
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

1921

6p



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TO  
ELIZABETH

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1

2

3

4

5

6

7

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LITTLE ANNE'S CALLING . . . . .	I
II. THE OLDEST ANNE . . . . .	13
III. THE QUIET ROOM . . . . .	23
IV. ANNE AND ANNE . . . . .	33
V. SMALL FURTHERING BREEZES . . . . .	45
VI. "THE FACE THAT LIT THE FIRES," ETC. . . . .	56
VII. THE POET'S CORNER . . . . .	68
VIII. CANDOUR . . . . .	81
IX. SOUNDINGS . . . . .	93
X. THE STRAY PAGE . . . . .	104
XI. PENITENTIAL . . . . .	115
XII. MAKING ALIVE . . . . .	127
XIII. THE ILL WIND . . . . .	139
XIV. ADJUSTMENT . . . . .	150
XV. OPPORTUNITY . . . . .	162
XVI. REVELATION . . . . .	174
XVII. HONOUR . . . . .	187

1925

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. MADE IN HEAVEN . . . . .	199
XIX. THE END OF THE PLAY. . . . .	210
XX. RICHARD . . . . .	222
XXI. WILBERFORCE, THE PAINTER . . . . .	235
XXII. EXITS AND ENTRANCES . . . . .	248
XXIII. THE FALL OF THE CURTAIN . . . . .	261

## THE ANNES



# THE ANNES

## CHAPTER I

### *Little Anne's Calling*

THE thin child on the floor was completely engrossed in her occupation, but she never gave fractional attention to anything. She rested on one elbow, her weight on her hip, one long, slender leg crooked under her, the other extended at length over the green carpet, the foot that ended it dropping in and out of its flat-soled pump as it see-sawed from heel to toe.

Suddenly the child sat up, raised her elfin face, pushed back her cropped dark hair from her dark, bright eyes with the back of a slender hand somewhat grimy on its knuckles.

"Mother, I know my vocation!" she announced.

Her pretty mother, as fair and placid as little Anne was dark and dynamic, bore this announcement calmly.

"You must have your hair bobbed again, Anne," she said. "What made you think of vocations, dear? At seven there is time enough for that; few vocations are decided quite so early."

"Yes, but I think it is nice to get it off your mind," Anne said. "I've been thinking about it for years, ever since Joan used to talk about it, when she used to think maybe she ought to be a sister. And then Antony came along, and she married him as

quick! I'd hate to wiggle around like that! So I've wondered a whole lot what my vocation was, and now I know."

Anne paused for the question which her mother dutifully put to her:

"Do you, dear? What is it?"

"Putting things on their legs. This beetle needs it. He gets on his back and kicks and kicks! It would melt a heart of stone. I turn him over and he feels ever so much cheerfuller! He doesn't stay right side up; he tips over again, but I think maybe it's partly the carpet. Anyway, I'm right here to set him going again. Prob'ly if he was a bird he'd sing to me, but poor black beetles haven't any voice. Crickets chirp, though; do you s'pose black beetles chirp when they are enjoying themselves together?"

Anne had dropped down again on her elbow, but she sat up again as a hope for black beetles awakened in her.

"I think not, Anne; I think they cannot voice their joy," said Mrs. Berkley, gravely.

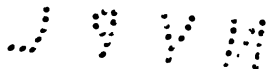
Anne sighed and lay out at full length on the floor.

"I s'pose not. But maybe they go singing in their hearts—— Why, Mother, that's a hymn, isn't it, mother? Is that a sin? I didn't mean it; honest to goodness, I never meant that hymn! Is it a sin, Mother?"

Once more Anne was excitedly erect.

"You have been told many times, Anne, that you cannot do wrong unless you mean to, sin is choosing to do wrong when you know what is right," said this conscientious mother. "How did your beetle happen to be in this room, Anne?"

"I brought him in, Mother," answered the child. "I turned him over out of doors, but I wanted to sit down and watch him flop. I s'pose I do upset him a little weeny bit sometimes! It's a great temptation, but then I'm right here to set him going again, and that's my vocation."



"It's really a beautiful vocation, Anne," said her mother. "To put someone on his feet and help him to walk, only I wouldn't confine it altogether to black beetles."

"People?" asked Anne. "Figuravely? Don't you mean that to be—— What are those stories? You know! All-all glory, or something?"

"Allegories. And figuratively, Anne. Yes, dear. It would be a beautiful vocation to help people to walk, wouldn't it? And it's sure to be yours if you're a good woman, as I pray you will be. One way or another all good women put people on their feet."

Mrs. Berkley hastily got her needle where it could do no harm, for she saw what was coming.

Anne scrambled to her feet, leaving her beetle on his back, vainly imploring the ceiling with his many active legs. Big girl that she was she threw herself upon her mother's lap, and hugged her hard.

"Like you, just for all the world, 'xactly like you, you most precious, beautiful motherkins, Barbara Berkley!" Anne choked herself in choking her mother. "You help everybody in this family on their feet, and you just lead 'em right along! I wonder where'd I'd be if 'twasn't for you showing me lovely things? Just like black beetle allegories this minute! My father, Peter Berkley, wouldn't be hardly anything if 'twasn't for you! You know yourself he'd never in this world remember rubbers! And prob'ly he'd die of it. And Joan—well, what in the world do you s'pose she'd do with the baby if she didn't ask you? And as to Peter-two——!" Words for once failed Anne. Her opinion of her obstreperous fourteen-year-old brother was luckily deprived of expression. He was surer of his own vocation than Anne was of hers; it was clear to him that his calling in life was to suppress Anne.

"Dear me, Anne-baby!" gasped Mrs. Berkley. "You have hugged me breathless and my hair is coming down! Not that

I am not glad that you are satisfied with me as a mother, little Anne!"

"Satisfied? Doesn't that mean sort of getting-along-with-it?" asked Anne, the student of words.

"Oh, no. It means that a thing exactly suits you in every way," explained Mrs. Berkley.

"Your hair isn't coming down; it's only rather loose. It's prettiest down, anyway; I'll fix it," said Anne. "Satisfied doesn't sound like that when people say it; they say it in a getting-along tone. When Joan got that centrepiece from Antony's Aunt Lil last Christmas she said: 'Oh, well, of course I'm *satisfied* with it!' Like that! 'Cause she per-fect-ly *de-tests* Renaissance lace. And don't you remember Peter-two made that awful bad joke about it? He said it was re-nuisance. *Nuisance*, you know, mother! Don't you see? Because Joan put it away to give someone else; that's what made the *re* part of the joke: an over-again nuisance, Mother! Joan said it was a perfect'ly stupid joke; she said it was a pun. What makes me remember bad jokes, Mother? I keep remembering Peter's worst ones. Joan said she was satisfied, but she means to give that centrepiece to someone else; Joan *said* to Mr. Richard Latham, because he was blind, but Joan didn't mean it; Joan never means anything not kind, like that! Now your hair isn't loose, lovely motherkins! I see Joan coming in the back way. She hasn't brought Barbara—— Mercy me! I forgot my beetle and Joan'll step on him, kersmash! Joan would never see a beetle; she goes along thinking of Antony Paul and Toots! I don't blame her; that's the loveliest baby I ever in all my life-time saw! And I always did say Antony was 'most too good for Joan, if she is my sister. I never expected in all my lifetime to have a brother-in-law who was half as nice as Antony Paul—so there!"

"Oh, Anne!" sighed Mrs. Berkley, her conscientious mother-

hood weighing upon her. "My hair may not be loose, but what about your little red tongue, my dear? I am afraid that Peter is right, and that we spoil you, child!"

"Oh, no, no, indeed, Mother!" Anne earnestly reassured her. "You bring me up just right. You let me do about everything that isn't wicked, only just a weeny bit kind of not like every little girl, but if I wanted a crime you wouldn't let me have it, and you teach me noble things—catechism and everything!"

Mrs. Berkley laughed her soft inward, chuckling laugh, as she often did at Anne's speeches.

"Such high-coloured words, little Anne! Fancy craving a crime!"

"Joan, dear, the baby must have let you sleep last night. You look blooming, my daughter!"

Mrs. Berkley arose to take into her arms a pretty young creature, all soft tints like her mother—sweet, normal, and contented, not in any way suggesting sisterhood to little Anne.

"Oh, Mother, dearest," Joan remonstrated in a voice that declared in its first note that it was made to sing lullabies, "as though Barbara were not always good now! For five months, since she passed her third month, she has let me sleep from eleven till two, and Antony and I love to have her waken before four because she is sweetest before dawn. Antony says the truly poetical time to see a baby is at dawn—provided you can get your eyes open to look! Antony is romantic; then he is ashamed of it and pokes fun at himself! Anne, you monkey, why don't you come over to kiss me? And what *have* you in your hand?"

"It's my beetle, Joan," said Anne, complying with her sister's request. "I am looking for a safe place for him, where he can get on his legs himself when I am gone. It ought to be something with kind of sticky walls. I don't mean sticky-that-holds-you, but sticky-that-can-be-stuck-to; that kind. If you don't mind,

mother, dear, I'll stand your prayer book, and the Imitation, and these other two little pious books around him, because they're all bound in that soft leather, like gloves, that makes you crawl, and I want him to crawl. It won't be sacrilegious to use them, because it's for charity, and bowls are dreadfully slippery."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Joan, staring, though she should have been accustomed to Anne.

"The beetle will be far happier out of doors, Anne," said her mother. "He will not enjoy walls, even of soft leather. Better let him go and find another when you want to help a beetle on his legs. Anne has discovered her vocation, Joan: it is helping beetles to their legs when they are on their backs and can't get up. I think that may quite easily prove to be a prophecy of her career!"

Joan laughed. "Heaven help the human beetle that wants to lie on his back if Anne gets after him later on! She would make him walk, possibly fly."

Anne had obediently carried the beetle out of doors and put him down in the grass. He showed as lively pleasure in being released from her ministrations as many another object of philanthropy would show if a chance to get away were offered it. Anne watched it scuttle off and returned to her family somewhat cast down.

"He kept right side up all right, and went off just as fast!" she announced. "I don't think he acted one bit attached to me. Maybe beetles aren't. Maybe if you have a shell you don't have a heart. That wasn't slang, Mother! I didn't say it! Peter-two told me he'd fine me if I said 'have a heart,' but I didn't! Honest that wasn't the same!"

"No, dear, it wasn't. That was science, not slang," Joan comforted her.

Anne went over and seated herself, cross-legged, in the deep

window seat. She fell into one of her meditative moods in which she was lost to all around her. Active or contemplative, Anne was always at the *nth* degree of her temporary condition.

Mrs. Berkley and her older daughter dropped into the intimate talk of a mother and daughter who are also close friends, sharing their experiences of matronhood.

At first Anne listened, wistful, feeling a little pushed aside. Joan had been married less than two years. Anne could remember when she had been to her pretty sister an enviable combination of her discarded doll, her little sister, and the forerunner of the baby, though this Joan herself, still less Anne, had not understood.

This had been almost three years ago, before Antony Paul had come and decided Joan against a convent, while she was still discussing her vocation in terms which had imprinted themselves upon Anne's memory. Anne had not been her sister's chief interest since she was four, so it was not that which she missed as she sat in the window seat; it was her mother's divided interest that the little girl grudged.

Anne's dog, Cricket, an apprehensive, black-and-tan, bow-legged beagle, came to sit close to his little mistress, snuggling his head backward to beg for her hand. Anne pulled his soft ears and lost herself in ill-assorted thoughts. At last she aroused; Joan was saying:

"Mother, you don't know men! Of course, there is Father; I must confess you know him perfectly. It takes perfect knowledge to manage a man as you manage him—and he never suspects it! Why, he even prefers to go your way after a step or two in the other direction! But you do that by being you, so sweet and gentle, and—and—well, always right, I suppose! But men are not like father; he is so reasonable! Now Antony is the dearest of dears, but I can't say he is always reasonable. Sometimes I simply cannot make him see things as I do. Then

I give in; it's my duty. But I'm afraid there's another side to it. I ought to make him see. Especially now that I have Barbara to train. Antony is so sweet I could get him to do anything if I cried, but that's a mean trick! A woman to play on a man's chivalry! I've got to study, strengthen my mind, you know! Men are much, much more childish than we are, mother, yet they are fearful to argue with; they're so horribly logical. And of all things you can't trust to bring you out in an argument where you expected to land, logic is the worst!"

Mrs. Berkley laughed her little amused laugh.

"It even leads you astray in the construction of a sentence apparently," she said. "I never knew a young matron who did not think that her study of her husband had revealed depths no other woman had ever fathomed. But I assure you, Joan, men are far more alike than women are. I have no doubt that by and by Antony will be led by you, just as you think your father is led by me. But rest assured, my dear, I don't lead your father by logic!"

Anne unwound herself and stretched her long, thin legs with a sigh.

"I shall never get married," she said. "I shall *not*! And it cramps dreadfully to sit with your legs under you on such a hard seat. I see Miss Anne Dallas. She is going to the post office, I s'pose; she has a lot of letters and stuff. She's going to mail them for Mr. Latham, most likely. She looks as nice! I think queer blue dresses are perfec'ly lovely. Kit Carrington has stopped her. He took off his hat most graceful. It's the way they do in stories, old stories, when it was long ago, when they doff their hats. So did Kit Carrington. I never knew how it was till now, but that's what he did: doffed it. Look, Mother. Like this."

Anne stood up and swept an imaginary hat to her side with a splendid gesture, then let her head droop deferentially and

struck a listening pose. Then she straightened her lithe body and turned upon her mother and sister an excited, glowing little face.

"Well, I never knew Kit was in love with Anne Dallas till now!" she cried.

"Anne!" her mother remonstrated. "I really will not allow you to be so impertinent. What a remark from a little girl like you! And *Kit*? You mean Mr. Carrington, I suppose? Mr. Christopher Carrington? And Miss Dallas? Do you?"

"Yes, Mother," said Anne, meekly. "I forgot. They all say Kit Carrington; he's so nice. That's the reason, I s'pose, and young of his age."

"He must be as much as twenty-three or four," observed Joan.

Then, inconsistently after her mother's rebuke, after the manner of older people with a precocious child like Anne, she asked:

"What possessed you to say that Kit Carrington was in love with Anne Dallas, child?"

"I can see he is," said little Anne, rejoicing in this opportunity to continue the subject. "He got all red and he's looking at her about like Antony when you come in, Joan; this way."

Anne thrust forward her head, wreathed her mobile lips into a chastened smile, and rolled her flashing dark eyes in what was meant for an adoring expression. She instinctively heightened her effect by clasping her hands, though Christopher Carrington had indulged in no gestures.

"Anne, really, I dislike this exceedingly," began her mother, but her rebuke was spoiled by Joan's flight to the window where she ensconced herself behind the curtains to verify Anne's report.

Mrs. Berkley had a sense of humour that asserted itself at unsuitable times. She chuckled now.

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, hast thou really espied Romance

from thy window?" she murmured. "Sister Anne, is thy report true of what approaches? But, alas for *your* little sister Anne's training, Joan! I can't join you; they would see me! What do you make out, Joan?"

Joan waved her hand behind her back, signalling to her mother to let her have Sister Anne's watch tower undisturbed for a few moments.

At last she turned away and came over to her mother, Anne with her; Anne had been frankly watching the conversation in the street, untrammelled by the handicap of adult years.

"Well, of course, Mother, one can't be sure of such a thing from across the street, looking on at one chance meeting, but it does seem as though our Anne's keen eyes were not far wrong," Joan announced. "Kit has an air of profound admiration. I couldn't say as to Anne Dallas; you can't tell much about a girl. I wonder! They've gone on now, in opposite directions. What a handsome boy Kit is! So manly, carries himself so well! He has the nicest smile I ever saw—except Antony's! I wonder, I do wonder!"

"Anne is a dear girl," said Mrs. Berkley. "If it were so—poor Richard Latham!"

"Oh, Mother, you don't think——" began Joan.

"Anne is a dear girl," repeated her mother. "Do you suppose it is likely that a lonely, hungry-hearted man like Richard Latham, sitting in darkness all his days, could have such a girl as Anne beside him constantly, writing his poems at his dictation, reading to him in her soft, lovely voice, serving him in countless ways, and not learn to love her? I've been hoping it would be so. For why should not Anne Dallas love him? Blindness is rather attractive than forbidding to a girl as sweetly compassionate as Anne. And to take at his dictation his beautiful words, his exquisite fancies, to hear them first of all the world, to come to feel, to know, that you inspired most of them, to write them for

him and be the medium through which the world knows them—can you imagine better food for love?"

"Well, now you say it," admitted Joan, slowly. "But if this attractive Kit, full of charm, young, does come wooing—I wonder! Poor Mr. Latham, indeed!"

"Perhaps we should say poor Miss Anne Carrington?" suggested Mrs. Berkley. "Kit's aunt would surely take the advent of Anne Dallas hard. She is inordinately proud of Kit, ambitious for him. She has intended him to marry Helen Abercrombie who is intemperately rich in her own right, and is the only child of ex-Governor Abercrombie. Miss Carrington had her here last summer, don't you remember?"

"With her car and other paraphernalia; of course!" agreed Joan. "Since we are distributing pity, Motherums, we'd better shed some on Kit and Anne, if they are interested in each other, for Miss Carrington would certainly make the course of their true love run uncommonly rough! I must go home to my daughter. Isn't it thrilling to think that we may have seen the curtain rise on an old-fashioned love drama, with a rival, a stern parent—an aunt comes to the same thing when she holds the hero's inheritance—the princess whom the young lover should marry, everything properly cast! Anne, you witch-child, you are an uncanny elf! Good-bye, dear."

Joan kissed her mother and her sister and was gone.

Anne stood scowling at the table cover, motionless for several minutes, unseeing, lost in thought.

"Anne, dear, what is it?" her mother aroused her.

"I was thinking this was the most Annest town I ever saw: Miss Anne Carrington, Anne Dallas, little Anne Berkley; prob'ly lots more," she said. "When I'm confirmed I'm going to take Ursula for my new name, 'cause there isn't one of them. Then you can call me that, so everybody'll know me apart."

"I can tell you apart, childie, this minute! Come here, little

Anne, and let me rock you, though your legs are uncomfortably long for this low chair." Mrs. Berkley held out her arms invitingly and Anne ran into them.

"Another thing I was thinking when you and Joan were talking about Mr. Latham and Ki—Mr. Carrington—all wanting to marry her. I think we're not half sorry enough for all the trouble everybody makes God, all wanting the same thing and praying about it! It must be awful to have to say no to such lots of 'em! And He can't say yes to more'n half when there's two, just even, you see. It makes me feel sorry for Him. Is that a sin, Mother?" Anne lifted her head out of her mother's shoulder and gazed at her with profoundly sad eyes.

Her mother kissed the lids down over those great dark eyes. Sometimes her heart ached with fear of this strange child's future. Then again Anne was so reassuringly human that the pang of anxiety over her unearthliness was swallowed up in anxiety of the opposite sort.

So now Mrs. Berkley kissed down the lids over the meditative eyes and murmured comfortingly:

"Little Anne must remember that God knows best."

Anne sprang to her feet with a whoop that made her mother gasp.

"Oh, yes, 'course!" she cried, swiftly disposing of theology for the moment. "I hear Peter-two coming in. He promised to bring me elder whistles for Cricket that'll just about make him come, no matter where he is, and if Peter-two hasn't done it—Well, he'll catch it!"

With which Anne rushed from the room. An instant later her mother's fear as to her son's safety—if she felt any—was set at rest by a whistle so shrill that it sent Cricket cowering under the sofa.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Oldest Anne*

CHRISTOPHER CARRINGTON threw the last third of his cigar into the fireplace and watched it as it tumbled over the back log. The back log made him think of his Aunt Anne, always there, always ready to be fired by smaller sticks. He had been restlessly touring the room for fifteen minutes, examining its ornaments, familiar to him from childhood, hardly conscious that he was handling bits of frail loveliness that his aunt never allowed other hands than her own to dust.

Miss Anne Carrington had watched Kit's adventures without comment, in spite of the strain upon her nerves, eying him with keen suspicion, now and then, giving him furtive glances that saw everything as she turned the pages of her book.

She was a tall woman, and thin, her hair was white, but her light blue eyes were undimmed; her nose was long and decidedly arched; her lips were settled into something that looked like a mocking smile. She looked uncompromising, but not so much so as she was; she looked intelligent and clever, but not as clever as she was.

She sat in a straight chair, a dignified old model, with her feet resting on a small stool. At her side stood the table that held her reading lamp; it was laden with books in French and English. Many of them lay open, face down, for Miss Carrington kept her books to serve her, and did not weigh their welfare against her convenience.

Her nephew, Christopher, was not only her nearest of kin, but her only kin near enough to consider as such. He was so dear to her, and in him her ambition had so concentrated, that existence under her domain had not been easy to him since he had passed the years when she could gratify all his desires by buying him the best sport trappings, outfits, horses, and boats that a spoiled lad could own. This Miss Carrington had done, and yet Kit was so little spoiled by these luxuries that his will was in danger of running counter to his aunt's ambition for him.

At last Miss Carrington laid her book across her knee and watched Kit's movements, frankly inviting confidence. Becoming conscious of this, he brought himself up with his elbow on the mantel and, turning toward her, said in that big, cheery voice of his that the old lady never could hear without thrilling to it:

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Anne! Do I give you the willies doing the zoo-tiger act like this?"

"I don't know their Christian name—though why jungle ways should have a Christian name I don't see—but if irritated nerves are willies, then, yes, you give them to me," said his aunt.

She spoke in a light, slightly acrid voice, her syllables articulated like Italian.

Kit laughed.

"Nice Aunt Anne!" he approved her, impersonally. "You always sit on a chap in a delightful way. I'll be seated, thanks."

He dropped into the deep chair on the right of the fireplace, stretching out to his great length. But Miss Carrington saw that he at once possessed himself of the tongs and began to open and shut them in a way as tiresome as his roaming had been.

Kit nervous? This hearty, athletic lad fidgeting? Miss Carrington wondered what was on his mind. Being clever she set out to discover indirectly. She had heard a suggestion that she loathed; it had come from Minerva, her maid, and Minerva, true to her name, was, as a rule, right.

Miss Carrington closed her book, first noting the page number, for she scorned bookmarks, laid it on the table, and picked up the latest number of a newspaper supplement devoted to book news.

"Here's a discussion of Richard Latham's verse and essays, Kit," she said. "Quite well done, discriminating, yet laudatory. The reviewer—it's not signed—considers him an artist who sends out nothing unworthy, who greatly rejoices those of fine perception, consequently the few, yet these to an extent that should compensate him for the smallness of his audience. Really it is praise worth having! I don't know Richard Latham as I should. I sent Minerva off after I'd read this to buy everything he has published. Cleavedge had only one volume, the one I already owned! So I sent her again to telephone New York, to tell Brentano's to send me Latham complete. That is the honour of a prophet in his own country!"

Kit smiled. His aunt would not have a telephone in her house, but she was constantly sending Minerva to telephone a message from the near-by drug store.

"And what of it?" Miss Carrington would defend herself. "Is sending Minerva seven times seventy trips a day equal to one's being on the ragged edge, dreading to be called at any hour?"

Now Kit smiled at his aunt, as she awaited his reply, and said:

"I'm not up in Mr. Latham's work myself, Aunt Anne. But then I'm far down in lots of poets."

"We'll hope you will come to them," returned his aunt. "From this review it appears that we should be immensely proud of Latham; by and by, apparently, pilgrims will come to Cleavedge to pick leaves from the ivy on his wall. Has he a wall? And ivy? Someone, it seems, wrote Richard Latham lately to ask for the genesis of one of his poems, also 'what he meant by' a certain stanza. That is true greatness, Kit; to get

inquiries as to the meaning of a poem! There is a letter published here, setting the anxious correspondent at rest. It speaks with authority for Mr. Latham, but is not written by him. It is not badly expressed, rather a nice letter. Signed A. D. I wonder what that stands for—when it isn't Anno Domini?"

All this long talk about Richard Latham to lead up casually to this question! And so casually reached that Kit never suspected!

He blushed slightly, as Miss Carrington noted, but he answered with his jolly laugh:

"It stands for something that sounds a good deal the same, but is different enough, Aunt Anne. It stands for Anne Dallas, I suppose; she's Richard Latham's secretary."

"Oh, does it? To be sure, he would have a secretary. Pity he is blind! And the secretary would be able to write a good letter. It's not remarkable; clear, intelligent, a good letter. His secretary must need patience—and no other interests. I suppose he might be more likely to get that in a woman, but I should want a man. However, he can get a woman sufficiently trained for his requirements at a lower salary than a man's. Anne Dallas, you said? Not a Cleavedge name. Where did he find her? I hope she doesn't annoy him, but if she is ugly he can't see it! It would be horrible to a poet to have an ugly woman under his beauty-loving eyes all day, week in, week out. I wonder—but of course you don't know, you don't visit Mr. Latham. She can't be a Cleavedge woman, I should think?"

Miss Carrington talked on lightly, not overdoing her carelessness, but with a voice silvery and indifferent. She watched Kit as she talked and saw him redden, trying boyishly to appear at ease.

"She isn't a Cleavedge girl; she came from Connecticut, Aunt Anne," Kit said.

"That's a state I like!" Miss Carrington approved, heartily.

"It's odd—kindly, too—the present fashion of calling unattached women girls. The letter sounded mature. I suppose it is because she is earning her living that you speak of her as a girl. Is she a widow? Didn't—no; you didn't call her Miss Dallas."

"Good gracious, no; she isn't a widow!" cried Kit, and instantly regretted his vehemence, for his aunt raised her eyebrows. "Miss Dallas is young; she is a girl, a girl with a lot of girlhood in her; the kind they used to call 'maidenly,' you know," Kit continued.

"I suppose you are forced to speak of maidenly as an obsolete term, Kit, my dear, because what it stood for is out of fashion," observed Miss Carrington. She had found out all that she wanted to know for this time and was too wise to pursue the subject.

"Of course I don't for an instant mean that girls are at heart less maidenly. That is a quality necessary to every generation, if civilization is to continue. But the outward and visible sign of that special inward grace is not worn as it was. I confess to regretting it. I claim to be modern, but it really was in beautiful good taste. I suppose a few exceedingly well-bred girls will retain that efflorescence to the end of the chapter, but the present fashion gives such horrible scope to bad taste! I found Helen Abercrombie refreshing last summer when she visited us. There's a well-bred girl!"

"But hardly maidenly," Kit could not refrain from saying, though he knew that it was indiscreet. "Miss Abercrombie is a finished product, of course, but she's too—too—— Oh, well, you know, Aunt Anne! You're an analyst of the first water! Too finished a product and up-to-the-minute, too architectural to be maidenly."

"Christopher," said his aunt, "there is no use whatever in ostrich-talk between us when it comes to Helen Abercrombie! You know as well as I do what is my hope for you in regard to

her. To beat about the bush is to talk as an ostrich is supposed to behave: you'd see my transparently covered outlines. In so many words, then, I want you to marry Helen. I'm glad that is said." Miss Carrington threw herself against her chair back and looked steadily at Kit.

"Aunt!" Kit drew in his breath sharply, protesting.

"And guardian," his aunt reminded him.

Kit flushed angrily; it was true that his prospects in life depended upon his aunt's favour.

"It doesn't seem decent to discuss it," Kit said. "As if I'd nothing to do but decide to beckon Helen."

"Between ourselves, Kit, I think Helen has already made the first signals," said Miss Carrington. "The woman usually does; Thackeray and George Bernard Shaw are right. I should be sorry to see you giving yourself the airs of a conqueror, but as an honest working basis between us we may as well admit the truth that Helen is of the same mind as Barkis."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Kit, helplessly. "I'm not in the least in love with her, Aunt Anne. I never could be."

"No," admitted Miss Carrington, judicially, "you are not. I think quite likely you never would be. I don't recall asking you to be, my dear boy."

Kit looked at her, his honest, rebellious young soul in his eyes.

"Christopher Carrington, listen to me with your intelligence, not merely with your ears," began Miss Carrington, bracing herself to her task. "I rather like your feeling, which your silence announces more eloquently than words, as novelists say. Youth is the time for dreams. It is for its elders to see to it that the dreams do not become nightmares. I want, I urge you to marry Helen Abercrombie because she is preëminently suitable. She is of our class; she is handsome, highly accomplished, wealthy. She is a woman to help on a man's career. Not only that, but she has it in her power to launch a man on his career. Her

father was the best governor this state ever had. He will be nominated and reëlected this coming year. He is certain to have an important portfolio in a not-far-distant cabinet; it is more than likely that he will be his party's presidential candidate next time. And that party is going in next time; heaven knows the country has had enough of the muddle of the past years at the other party's hands! As Governor Abercrombie's son-in-law you would be secure of a good diplomatic appointment. And there is nothing like such an experience to make a man, Kit! It would give you what nothing else could of dignity, of *savoir faire*. I will not allow you to turn aside from such opportunity. Then, if the not unlikely sequence follows, as President Abercrombie's son-in-law——"

Miss Carrington shrugged her shoulders with an outward gesture of her open palms that ended her sentence for her eloquently, a trick that she had learned in her own long years abroad. A bright red spot burned in each cheek and her guarded eyes gleamed with the fire of ambition. Kit stared at her; she rarely revealed herself to this extent. He cried: "Aunt Anne, that's all very fine, but would you have me marry a woman whom I did not love for ignoble, selfish motives?"

"Ignoble!" cried his aunt, sharply. "Do you call ambitions such as any manly man would leap toward, ignoble? Why, what else is there in life but its prizes? The bigger the better, but prizes at least. Selfish, yes! Who isn't selfish? Children are frightened by words, not men. Of course you're selfish. But if you enjoy beclouding your conscience tell yourself you'll use your attainment unselfishly. You won't, but many better, cleverer men than you, my little Christopher, befuddle themselves with pretty terms. In the meantime win, win, win your ends! Let me tell you, Kit, that there's more sensible unselfishness in marrying for prudence than for romance: the result of that endures!"

Kit looked at his aunt with genuine pity. He knew that her ambition for him represented all that was in her of ideals, of love. A remembrance of Major Pendennis and young Arthur flitted across his mind; he pitied his aunt, but he feared lest one day he might pity himself.

"You don't know, Aunt Anne," he said, gently. "It must be frightful to be married to someone whom you can't love. In the marriage you urge upon me there would be neither love nor respect; I should not love my wife, nor respect myself. You can't realize it, Aunt Anne."

"Bless the child!" cried Miss Carrington with a laugh. "Does he imagine himself at twenty-four wiser than a worldly old woman of sixty-eight? You mean that I can't realize your bugaboo situation because I didn't marry. But I was to marry once! Another woman stole my husband. There was excuse for her according to you, for I was going to marry him for ambition, and she loved him madly. I remained their friend, and I saw my vengeance. They were wretchedly unhappy, while I, with my ambition answering to his, would have crowned him."

Miss Carrington arose and drew herself up to her full height, which was equal to Kit's. Her narrow slipper of black silk, simply bound, without an ornament, dropped off as she arose. Kit sprang to put it on for her. She leaned on his shoulder and watched him fit the slipper on her foot. She was inordinately proud of her long, narrow feet, and never adorned their apparel.

"You see, my boy, I practise what I preach; I have ample space to stand in. Learn from the parable of the loose slipper and do not cramp your foundations." She leaned forward to smile into Kit's face, almost coquettishly.

"My fine lad," she resumed, "gratify your aunt, who is almost your mother, and make your life what marriage with Helen Abercrombie will let you make it. Trust me, Kit, as a wise woman who knows her world. It will never do to face it wearing

rose-coloured glasses. 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,' and it is my experience that you need not bother about the other part of your rendering. God is sure to take the things that are God's Himself; you need not render them. They are vital things, too, my dear; your strength, your health, your youth, at last your life. Make sure of all that you can get; it is not too much."

Kit stood with hanging head, her arm over his shoulders. He was distressed. Never had his aunt betrayed herself to him as now, and the vision of her destitution shocked his manhood, his ideals, his conscience. To have lived almost to her three score and ten, to be so clever, so strong, yet to have garnered no wheat, but only bright pebbles!

"Well, Kit," Miss Carrington said, altering her tone and withdrawing her arm as she turned to leave him, "I'll not ask for your answer now; in fact, I don't want you to answer yet. But I beg you to remember that I implore you to marry Helen Abercrombie, and to marry soon. You are precisely the sort of boy who falls in love and makes a hopeless mess of his life from the loftiest plane of boundless idiocy. You were always quixotically lovable. I'm ready to admit that it is most charming in a boy, my dear, but it is fatal to a man. So listen to your doting aunt, and on your life do not disobey her! What are you going to do while I take my siesta?"

Kit felt, as his aunt meant him to feel it, the veiled threat in her warning, but he answered her question:

"I told young Peter Berkley that I'd give him my collection of postage stamps if he'd come around. I'm looking for him any minute."

"That is nice little Mrs. Peter Berkley's boy? The brother of my extraordinary namesake, little Anne? She is Methusette on one side and an innocent baby on the other. I could greatly enjoy cultivating little Anne Berkley's acquaintance,"

said Miss Carrington. "I complained of difficulty in threading a needle the other day—it was the sewing afternoon at the hospital, an occasion which I grace, but hardly serve—and Mrs. Berkley had brought Anne to thread needles for us. That small elf changeling urged me to make a pilgrimage to Beaupré to get my sight restored, because, forsooth, my name being 'Anne' the good Saint Anne would be likely to help me! The mother is a remarkably nice, genuine person; pity she's so *devote!*"

"Oh, I don't know," murmured Kit. "It seems to suit the Berkleys."

"That's true. And of course if one is going in for that sort of thing the only possible logic lies in the Old Way. I can see consistency in being *Other* Worldly, but to be unworldly, my boy, is, as I've been eloquently telling you, utter nonsense," said Miss Carrington, graciously. "I'll go up now and get Minerva to read me into a nap. Tell young Peter to come another time and bring that clever, queer little sister of his, will you? Anne Berkley and Anne Carrington are far enough apart in years and views to become cronies."

Miss Carrington stepped back and gathered up an embroidered shawl of Chinese silk which had slipped into a tiny roll at the back of her chair. She hung it over her arm; its long fringe and heavily embroidered flowers brushed Kit's hand as he held the door open for her to pass through it. He returned to the fireplace and leaned upon the mantel, waiting for young Peter with a heaviness of heart unlike himself.

"A pilgrimage to gain her sight!" thought Kit. "Little Anne's advice was not half bad. She would not agree to all this; she is as untainted by the world as a blossom in an old-time garden!"

The smile that made his rugged young face so gentle showed that the "she" of this encomium was not little Anne Berkley.

## CHAPTER III

### *The Quiet Room*

CLEAVEDGE had received its name from the steep sides of the river which cleft its rocky bank formation. It may have been a misapprehension of a word—strangers spelt it "Cleavage" till they learned better—or the settlers who christened it may have meant to embody in the word the picturesque cleft edges of the cliffs. Cleavedge, with its misspelling, it remained through the growth of the village into a prosperous little city.

Richard Latham lived in a shady street not much disturbed by traffic. Several other streets ran in the same direction, leading more directly to wherever any one would be likely to go, so Latham Street was not greatly disturbed by footfalls, either. The street had been lately rechristened; Cleavedge was beginning to be aware of its celebrity.

In the beautifully proportioned living room of a house that entertained too few guests to require a drawing room the poet passed his days. It was a room built around with bookshelves uncrowded by furniture; its warm-tinted, drabbish walls hung with fine pictures and lighted by lovely gleams of colour in the pottery that occasionally broke the long stretches of the dull oiled wood of the bookcase tops. It was a man's room, without curtains, or anything meaningless; a room of perfect beauty, inexpressibly soothing. It possessed a sort of visible silence, the silence of the woods; it was a place in which to think and to feel, rather than to act. At one end stood the piano which alone

suggested sound, but to one who had heard Richard Latham play it emphasized the harmony.

At the desk, alone in the room, sat a young girl—Anne Dallas. Here she prepared her notes and carried them away to write them out where the clatter of a typewriter could not penetrate this room.

All soft browns was this Anne, hair, eyes, even the tint of her beautiful skin, warmly pale, clear, but of a shade that suggested a page that had lain under the sun's rays.

Her hair covered her shapely head across the back from crown to neck, from ear to ear; she wore it parted and coiled in the only way its masses allowed her to treat it. There was no attempt at coquetry in the simplicity of her dress, yet no carefully thought out costume could have more perfectly adorned her, nor made her more harmonious to the room, for girl and room were each a foil to the other.

She wrote rapidly, happily humming to herself a slight air that did not get in the way of her thoughts; she smiled as she followed the balanced phrases in which Richard Latham had developed an idea that demanded the best of the language. It was said that Latham used English as no American now used it, that he was the master of a style that could not be taught.

He came into the room as Anne Dallas began another page of her copy.

She rose to greet him, but did not move toward him. She had learned that he liked to go about without anything to remind him of his misfortune. He knew every inch of this room perfectly, literally by heart, for he had himself designed it before he had been stricken. He often went straight to the right shelf and laid his hand upon the book that he wanted.

"Good morning, Miss Dallas," he said. "'Richard and Robin were two lazy men!' I'll warrant that's what you were thinking,

and that Richard had not cured himself of 'lying in bed till the clock struck ten.'"

"More likely you were tramping before the clock struck five!" cried Anne.

"That's nearer the mark than your rash judgment and condemnation of me by a text from Mother Goose!" said Richard Latham, throwing himself appreciatively into his comfortable chair. "I was out at six and I'm nicely tired, just enough tired to want to cut work. Besides, you extracted from me yesterday everything I have to say on every known subject! I shall have to wait to fill up from whatever the sources are that supply ideas. You're a frightful person for getting a poor fellow going and keeping him at it till you've got all his brains down in funny little cabalistic signs. Then the next day you write out pages and swear the utterances that fill me with awe were hidden under those inky wriggles! I don't believe it! You insist the inky-wriggles wisdom is mine. Stuff and nonsense! Why, I don't know a fraction of what you say I dictate to you! It's uncanny. The only thing that I don't understand, and which gives a tint of colour to your statement, is that I've no brains left after one of those frightful days when you wind me up—like yesterday! It's all curious. Still more so that by to-morrow you'll wind me up again, and so on, *da capo*. But not to-day, Miss Thaumaturga! Not a bit of work shall you get out of me to-day, not the least preposition for you to set down in a dash or a dot!"

"Very well, Mr. Latham," laughed Anne, resuming her seat and taking up her pen. "I have quite enough to do to write out what you gave me yesterday. It was a particularly productive day. You are right. Perhaps I shall ask you to listen to what I have when it is written. That will not be till well after lunch; shall you be ready then for me, do you think?"

"No," said Richard Latham, promptly. "I shall not be.

Please put down that pen, which I'm sure you've taken up, and put down with it all thought of work. Unless reading aloud is work? Is it hard for you to read to me? You always assure me that you don't mind it, but I'm afraid you may. I don't want to be troublesome. To-day I'd like to cut work and be read to. It is quite true that I've brain fag, and that you did wind me up to a frightful speed yesterday. I'm conscious that it is you who do it; I wonder how? It's precisely as if you at once put into me and took out again what would never be in my brain if you didn't do this. Are you the poet and not I, after all?"

"Hardly," said Anne, smiling, with the woman's instinct to mask the trouble that vaguely stirred in her, although this man could not see her face. "I am industrious, but not gifted. If I've any part in it, I suppose it is because you feel my delight in what you are creating, and that unconsciously urges you on. I suspect it's no more than the simple thing we call genius, and that it takes it out of you to ride Pegasus."

Richard Latham kept his blind eyes turned steadily toward her as if he could see her and would fathom the mystery. He shook his head. "That isn't it," he said, slowly. "There is something about you that makes me do my best, and more than my own best. I had other people before you came to help me, and it was a regular grind. No grind with you to start me off and hold me to it, you quiet wonder-worker! But you didn't tell me; do you mind reading to me to-day? I don't want to be troublesome."

He repeated the words with a wistful note in his voice that made Anne spring to her feet and cross to a chair near him. She clasped her hands in her lap, her face sweet with pity. She could not endure it that this man, whose genius she followed breathlessly, should fear to burden others. It stabbed her to know that he never could escape this fear.

"Ah, Mr. Latham," she said, and she did not know how her voice caressed him, nor how he at once leaped to meet the caress and shrank from that pitiful thing, pity, which may be akin to love, but which is to a lover but a bastard kin that usurps love's throne, "don't you know that the hours in which I read to you are delightful to me? Try to imagine what I get from them, with you to supplement what I read! I never tire reading, but——" Anne got no farther. Richard Latham started up with an exclamation, then dropped back into his chair.

"But you would read whether you like it or not, you started to say, then remembered that I might not want to hear it! You would serve me in any way that you could, out of your great, womanly compassion? I know it, oh, I know it, Anne Dallas! I am grateful; don't think I'm not. It's a big thing to have lavished upon me. I'm glad that at least you don't think of your help to me as secretarial duty."

"Oh, Mr. Latham, if you don't want to be hurt, then don't hurt me!" cried Anne, shrinking.

"Forgive me," said Latham, humbly.

He bent forward and took her hand, not fumbling for it, knowing precisely where it lay, Anne noticed, wondering.

"That was a cowardly, contemptible speech! I believe I wanted to hurt you! There is a confession, and it amazes me as much as it can you that it is true. I told you that I was tired to-day; it's nerves. Set it down to nerves, won't you? That sounds like a sneaking plea for mercy, but I don't mean it that way. You'd rather it were my nerves than myself that were unkind? It would be such a beastly thing to want to hurt you of all people! Confession deserves absolution when it is sincere and contrite, doesn't it?"

"No. It makes it unnecessary," said Anne, softly. She was glad that he could not see the tears in her eyes. Never before had this brave and gentle soul betrayed to her the effort that

it cost him to be and to do without complaint all that he was and did.

"Kind little Shriver!" said Richard Latham, pressing the hand that held his tighter than Anne knew.

Then he laid it back beside its mate in her lap and arose, laughing.

"It will never do for me to be neurasthenic as well as blind," he said, cheerfully. "I suspect I'm staying indoors too much; a man should go hay-making—when the sun shines! I'll fetch the book I have in mind for to-day's reading—unless you have something you'd prefer?"

He stepped quickly across the room, went to the poetry shelves, stooped, and took from the middle shelf a volume which he slapped on his left hand, brushed it across the top, and brought it to Anne.

"Suit you? Are you in the mood for it?" he asked.

It was Dante in the prose translation. Anne looked at it and smiled up at him.

"Just in the mood for it," she said. "But I'd like to read the 'Paradise'—or would you rather 'begin at the beginning,' as children say?"

"No, indeed; I'd rather hear 'Paradise' myself," Richard Latham said, and resumed his chair, pulling his smoking table up to it.

"It's your one secretarial fault, Miss Dallas: you are not a linguist. I've a fine old tooled copy of Dante, Italian. I'd like to teach you Italian. I lived over there a good while. Perhaps we may take up——"

He broke off sharply. "I beg your pardon, Miss Dallas; I'm delaying you."

Anne opened the volume, once more hurt and puzzled. Richard Latham was always so equable, so friendly toward her that she could not understand this new mood. The tone of his

last words relegated her to the unbridgable distance of his hired secretary.

Anne began to read at the third book, the "Paradise." Her voice was troubled at first, but Richard smoked rapidly, apparently unconscious of it, he whose ear was ordinarily quick to hear a note of fatigue in her voice.

Anne loved beauty, and in a few moments she had forgotten herself in Dante's vision; a little longer and she forgot her listener, which was far more. She read on and on until at last Richard put out his hand to check her.

"You are thirsty," he said in the old gentle way to which Anne was accustomed. "And it is one o'clock. The sun is around on the other side; that means past noon. We shall not lunch till two to-day; I told Stetson to have a carriage here at three. We are going to have a real holiday, you and I. Stetson is of the party in case I feel like walking in unfamiliar places and need his arm. So put up your book and rest till luncheon."

"How delightful, Mr. Latham!" cried Anne. "I rarely drive."

"You are a little girl still, my helpful secretary! How old did you tell me you were?" Richard asked, well-pleased by her pleasure.

Anne arose and dropped a curtsy. Richard felt the motion of her swaying body and laughed at her.

"I am twenty-two, please, sir!" she said in a thin treble. "But I hope to be more."

"Since you can't be less?" Richard suggested. "Perhaps you can't be more, either, in another sense? At least you are a good child, and I'm grateful to you. What nice times we have in this rather nice room which I made once upon a time and still enjoy almost as if I saw it! I'm glad that we have long days to ourselves and don't suffer many interruptions. Yes, Stetson, want

me?" he added as his man put his head into the doorway, knocking on the casement as he did so.

"Little Miss Berkley is here, sir, little Anne Berkley. And young Mr. Carrington—though for that matter the only Mr. Carrington—to see you, Mr. Latham," he said.

"Bring them in here, Stetson," said Richard Latham, rising and passing his hand over the back of his head which he had been indulging in a pleasant friction against the back of his chair.

"Please, Miss Dallas, am I too badly rumpled? Miss Anne Berkley is a critical though dear friend of mine."

"No, not badly rumpled," returned Anne. Her cheeks were red and her eyes had brightened at the announcement of these visitors.

Stetson returned with them. Little Anne was freshly, beautifully groomed. She precipitated herself upon Richard Latham with a cry of joy, as if she had not been sure of finding him unchanged.

"I've not seen you in ages, and I certainly am glad I came!" she cried.

"Thank you, my dear; I echo your sentiments, with the added interest of five times your years," said Richard, shaking her hand, earnestly.

"No, you don't love people better because you're the oldest, do you?" Little Anne corrected him. Then she remembered her duty.

"I brought my friend Kit—Mr. Christopher Carrington, to see you." She turned, but Kit was talking to Anne Dallas and for an instant little Anne stared, recalling what she had forgotten.

"Well, to think I never remembered!" she gasped. "This is him," she added, her customary English deserting her under the stress of emotion.

"This is Kit, Mr. Latham. He thought he'd like to know you on account of your works, only I guess——"

She checked herself; Anne was a discreet child, and sympathetic.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Carrington," said Richard Latham, heartily, using a verb that did not seem inappropriate to him. "I know your aunt, Miss Carrington. She is a clever woman, most interesting."

"She is a wonder, is Aunt Anne," agreed Kit. "She would have brought me here, but I met little Anne and availed myself of her friendly offices."

"Even your aunt is not a better social sponsor than Miss Berkley," said Richard Latham, bowing to little Anne. "The important thing is that you have come. I've an idea! We are going for a long, and, I hope, delightful drive into the country after lunch, which will be at two; Miss Dallas and I were going to take my man Stetson, because a blind man may easily need the help of a strong arm in exploring. I'm sure I can persuade little Anne to go. She's fond of her namesake, Miss Dallas. What about it, Anne? Will you go if I telephone to your mother and get her consent?"

Little Anne clasped her hands upon her thin little chest.

"I think it would be so deliciously wonderful-joyful that I'd never, never forget it if Mother would say yes!" she cried, passionately.

"Bad as that, superlative little Anne?" laughed Richard.

"Mr. Carrington, if you will lunch with me and go on the drive, and would be so kind as to give me a hand over a stile, or whatever lay in my path, I'll gladly drop Stetson out of the party. Will you do this?"

"You are awfully kind, Mr. Latham," said Kit, gratefully. He glanced at Anne Dallas, but she did not meet his eyes. She was looking intently at Richard Latham, and it seemed to Kit that her expression was unhappy.

"I'm only too glad to go, thank you," Kit went on. "I

wonder if I may use your telephone? Aunt Anne will be expecting me to lunch. She won't have a telephone in the house, but I can call the druggist and get him to send his boy around with a message. Aunt Anne has ways all her own!"

"I can imagine it. My telephone is in the hall; Miss Dallas will show you where. And will you call Mrs. Berkley, Miss Dallas, and get her consent to kidnapping her child?" Mr. Latham smiled at little Anne. Little Anne clasped her hands in her own dramatic gesture.

"Oh, dear, dear, dearest Miss Dallas, please let me call Mother myself! I don't get many chances to telephone, and I love, just *love* to do it! And I want to tell mother my own self what a great, great thing has happened to me. You said a carriage, didn't you, Mr. Latham? It's pretty nearly always a car. I'm not quite, perfec'y certain I ever've rode—roden—I mean ridden in a carriage. I've rode—ridden—in the grocer's wagon, but I can't remember a carriage. I'd love to tell mother. And with a real poet! Would you mind, Miss Anne Dallas, if I did it myself?"

"Bless your funny little heart, Anne, of course I shouldn't mind!" cried Anne Dallas. "Come, both guests!"

Richard Latham, left behind, stood quietly waiting, unconsciously listening to the telephone jingle, to Kit's strong voice, to little Anne's excited piping.

Suddenly and unreasonably he felt old and alone. He was not old, but he was alone, and around him in the beautiful room that he had made, with its spacious calm, its books, its pictures, was complete darkness.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Anne and Anne*

**M**INERVA came cat-footed up the stairs and knocked at Miss Carrington's sitting-room door.

Miss Carrington lowered her book, frowning impatiently.

"It's maddening never to hear you coming, Minerva," she said. "Luckily my nerves are equable. Now what do you want?"

"Merton sent his boy around with a message from Master Kit—Mr. Carrington. You are not to wait lunch for him; he is lunching out," said Minerva.

"I wonder where?" murmured Miss Carrington, but she resumed her book as if the wonder were not keen.

"With Mr. Richard Latham, the poet." Minerva had waited for the question and her eyes snapped with enjoyment at her answer.

"What!" cried Miss Carrington, erect in an instant. "Kit doesn't know him."

"It would seem that he must, now," suggested Minerva. "He's lunching there. There's no mistake in the message, because Tommy didn't merely say 'Mr. Latham,' nor 'the poet,' but '*Mr. Richard Latham, the poet.*' That's too much to get wrong."

"It's too much, whatever Merton's boy said. How in the world did it happen?" Miss Carrington speculated. "I suppose the secretary asked him there for some reason——"

"The reason wouldn't be hard to guess, Miss Carrington,"

said Minerva, who knew how to ingratiate when she wished to. "Mr. Latham's housekeeper, as you well know, is a friend of mine. She goes to Allen's, the grocer's, at this hour every day. To be sure he's not our grocer, but the same brand of cocoa is the same brand wherever you buy it, provided the tin isn't unsealed, and we haven't enough cocoa for more'n two makings."

"Well, Minerva, I don't want to run short of cocoa," said Miss Carrington, gravely. "You'll find my change purse in the small right-hand drawer of my bureau. Don't charge anything at Allen's; I don't like the place. I hope you won't be long."

"No longer than is necessary, Miss Carrington. Mrs. Lumley has to be given her head in talking around Robin Hood's barn—provided I meet her. You can't talk to her till she's talked off to you whatever's on her mind," Minerva answered.

The sage Minerva had found Miss Carrington's small worn tray purse, and now she took herself soundlessly away, with complete understanding between herself and her mistress as to what was expected of her.

Miss Carrington admitted her maid to intimacy though not to friendship; a lone woman must of necessity do so. No one else in her life had ever been so deeply within it as Minerva had grown to be during twenty years of service as Miss Carrington's personal attendant, day and night, in sickness and in health.

Minerva held Miss Carrington at an estimate unlike her friends' estimate of her; in some ways it was less, in some ways more, accurate.

She realized that Miss Carrington was clever, but she could not gauge her learning as her friends did. She had no way of knowing how witty, how accomplished her mistress was. On the other hand, no one else appreciated so fully her acumen, her efficiency.

With this appreciation, Minerva held her mistress stupid not to have achieved more. What was a maiden lady at nearly

seventy, after all? Minerva's dull sister had done better for herself; she had a husband, the rank of matron. Minerva discounted Miss Carrington's fierce pride in being Miss Anne Carrington, of the original Cleavedge Carringtons—perhaps because it was too fierce?

Minerva knew her mistress's faults even better than her friends did, but not the same faults. To her friends Miss Carrington was generous, unselfish, nobly, though faultily, scornful of these virtues in herself, too detached to practise them as virtues, just as she was too much engrossed in her pursuits to be lonely.

Minerva knew that she was not generous, though she lavished money; that she was bound on all sides by herself, for which self and through which self she saw all things, beyond which she never aspired. Minerva knew that she was so far from detachment that all her thoughts were chained to Anne Carrington, except when they reached out to Kit, who was but another form of her self-seeking.

Minerva knew that Miss Carrington's temper was difficult, not less so that the restrictions which she put upon its vent made it fairly good-mannered. And, finally, Minerva knew that her mistress was neither indifferent to her reputation nor so happy in the use of her clever brain that she was not lonely. She knew that Miss Carrington was cruelly lonely; that her loneliness was growing inward, feeding, battenning upon her; that her daily fight was against her fear of the dark, the dark that was within.

Minerva loved her mistress and detested her. Nothing could have induced her to leave her, nor to forego her daily anathemas of her. Miss Carrington depended upon Minerva and detested her; leaned upon the keenness of the judgments of her class; called her by word and act a fool; berated her sarcastically; walked on tip-toe for fear of her; told herself that she would not keep Minerva beyond the season then passing; would have deprived herself of all else to retain her.

It was a curious relation, a strange attitude, equally contradictory on both sides, but it was one common between two women who are rivetted together, whether as mistress and maid, friends or sisters, or even, not infrequently, mother and daughter.

Miss Carrington had ordered lunch hurried, and had finished it when Minerva returned. It had seemed to her an unreasonably long time that she was kept waiting; she greeted Minerva with the remark that she had been forever when she came in.

"It took as long as it took," remarked Minerva, laying upon the table a small packet tied around its middle with a cotton string. "Cocoa is two cents more at Allen's than it is at Boothby's, but that's only a postage stamp, and often and often there's little news in a letter though it overweighs." Minerva dearly loved sybilline utterances.

"Did you meet Mrs. Lumley and was she satisfactory?" Miss Carrington asked.

"As to satisfactory, she is a lump!" declared Minerva with scornful emphasis. "But she did speak of Mr. Kit's being there, and I know all about it. It seems that little Anne Berkley brought him there with her. As though you didn't know Mr. Latham! That little witch is a prime favourite of Mr. Latham's and visits him a great deal; she's everybody's favourite, and she would amuse a blind man. And the child is very fond of Miss Dallas, the secretary. So Master Kit gets little Anne to take him there. And he is asked to lunch. And after lunch the party is going driving, with horses, mind you, like their own grandfathers." Minerva was intensely scornful of this reversion. "Master Kit, the secretary, and the child, Mr. Latham, of course. And Stetson, who was going in case of being needed, is left, and Mr. Kit will be beside Mr. Latham, who likes to drive, but has to be watched and told which way, and all that. And they had a pleasant lunch party, laughing and talking.

Mrs. Lumley heard little Anne's voice a good deal, and they were laughing at her. So that's as far as any one could tell you who wasn't one of them. And I'm going to have my luncheon now, Miss Carrington, for chilled cream sauce, which I saw passing through, with cold potatoes, is not desirable. But cold they are, and often will be for me, I suppose, while I do for you."

"After all, it tells me nothing, except that apparently Kit went there on his own initiative," said Miss Carrington, rubbing her nose with manifest annoyance. "If the girl had invited him he would not have needed little Anne Berkley's good offices. If I knew which way they had gone—it's a good day for a drive."

"Ah, to be sure; I asked that," said the thorough Minerva, turning back. "I forgot to tell you. Mrs. Lumley said that little Anne went out to see her after lunch. She is very partial to the child, and Anne never forgets to visit her. She asked Anne where they were driving, and Anne laughed and said: 'Out to the willow-ware china park.' Now I ask you if that isn't exactly like little Anne Berkley? She's just so nonsensical. Mrs. Lumley says she's no mortal idea where it can be, but that Mr. Latham and little Anne have all sorts of names for things and people, which they make great secrets. You could easily overtake them in the car, and they poking with horses, if you knew where a 'willow-ware china park' might be."

Miss Carrington smiled.

"No wonder that little Anne and Mr. Latham enjoy each other if they make life as interesting as that!" she mused. "Let me think where it can be. Willow ware—a small bridge—why, of course, Minerva! It's the park on the west side where they've bridged that tiny stream and put up a summer pagoda! Tell Noble to have the car around in ten minutes. I'll not change my dress. You've been out and know what the weather is; get out the coat I need, and bring up that new veil; I left it in the library. Help me dress; first call Noble."

Miss Carrington hastened upstairs and Minerva went out of the swinging door at the rear, outraged, but muttering:

"It's as cold now as it can be; I suppose another half-hour won't matter."

Within fifteen minutes Miss Carrington was sitting back against the cushions of her car, seeing neither the lovely spring day nor Daniel Noble's respectable mulberry-coloured back, so occupied was she with her plan.

There were several ways to reach the new park, and on the way thither Miss Carrington did not overtake the carriage for which she was watching. But as her car slowly wound around the pretty though unconvincing mazes of the carefully planned little park, she saw the carriage standing empty, except of a youth, evidently garnered on the spot, who was holding the horses. Three adult figures and a child were standing on the small bridge over the toy stream. It was so ludicrously like the old willow-ware pattern that Miss Carrington smiled at the resemblance, though she was sharply intent upon getting a first impression of the young woman of the group. She saw that the girl was not above medium height, that she was graceful, well-dressed, refined in bearing and gesture. As she raised her bent head and looked straight at the car, Miss Carrington saw a face so sweet, so full of charm that her heart sank.

"Mercy upon us, she's one of those creatures whose really great prettiness is not equal to their intense femininity; her eyes are beautiful. She's a permeating creature, and looks as affectionate as good—but not one bit stupid! Oh, poor Kit. That's a rare type, hard to supplant. I've got to see to it that she doesn't get as far as that," thought this wise woman.

In the meantime, Miss Carrington was saluting Kit, who recognized her with anything but delight on his tell-tale face, she bade Noble drive on, but slowly. She kept in sight of the movements of the group on the bridge, and timed her re-

turn to it by another spur of the road just as the Latham party left it.

"My dear Mr. Latham!" Miss Carrington said, leaning over the side of her car to take the poet's hand. "I am truly glad to meet you here. I've been wishing that I might ask you to come to me, but one fears to be intrusive. I know that the world is pursuing you, as you are retreating from it. I have a find in the book way that I should like to show you."

"Thank you, Miss Carrington," said Richard. "You are kind. And you are not to be reckoned one of the world which you imagine is hunting me down; you are my neighbour. I shall be grateful to be allowed to come to see the book, and you."

He spoke with lovable deference, pitying her as a lonely old woman. Miss Carrington could not hide from his blind eyes and keen intuition that this was what she was.

"Kit, my dear, I am glad to find that you have met Mr. Latham; it was but the other day we were saying that you should know him, if he wouldn't mind too much being bothered with a lad like you. Little namesake Anne, how do you do, my dear?" Miss Carrington graciously extended her greetings.

"I am quite well, thank you, Miss Carrington. You have two namesakes here now," said little Anne.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Carrington! May I present to you Miss Dallas? As little Anne says, she is another namesake of yours, an Anne," said Richard Latham.

"Delighted to meet you, my dear," said Miss Carrington, graciously, so graciously that Kit's experience gave him forebodings. "You must be the happy girl of whom I've heard, who helps Mr. Latham to enrich us all? And I read your clever explanation of his poem, 'The Mole.'"

"I am glad that you see me as a happy girl, Miss Carrington. I am completely happy to be doing what I'm doing here," said Anne Dallas.

"What a lovely voice!" Miss Carrington groaned inwardly. "There is no more dangerous gift!"

"Would it be rank selfishness, Mr. Latham, if I begged this modest girl, who ignores her usefulness to you, and so to us all, to take pity on my friendlessness to-day and go back in the car with me? I am alone. Would you be angry? And will you humour me, Miss Dallas? I drive alone so much that one would expect me to get used to it, but I never do."

"I'd like to go with you, Miss Carrington," said Anne Dallas, truthfully. "Solitude in a car is more solitary than a carriage with only one in it. I suppose because the horses are friendly. Mr. Latham doesn't want me, do you?"

"I don't need you, Miss Dallas," Richard Latham smilingly corrected her. "Here is little Anne who will play Casabianca, won't you, Anne?"

"Do you mean stick? That's the boy 'when all but him had fled,' isn't it?" asked little Anne. "'Course I will! That's how I started, and I'd rather stick, if you please."

"Come, then, Miss Dallas," said Miss Carrington, and Kit sprang to open the car door, his silence unbroken. "You are also 'little Anne,' in comparison with me."

Anne Dallas jumped into the car and curled down beside Kit's aunt, surprised, but happy in the friendliness which she was too simple to mistrust. It was with a gloomy face that Kit watched them away, knowing how inadequate to gauge his aunt's mind Anne Dallas's honesty was, and fearing mischief from the old lady's cordiality. He knew perfectly well that in some way his aunt had learned his whereabouts and had come to investigate.

"Now, my dear, tell me how you happen to be in Cleavedge," said Miss Carrington, turning toward the supple young figure luxuriously nestling beside her. "You are not the sort of girl we are accustomed to here."

"Don't condemn me unheard!" laughed Anne, refusing to

hear the delicate emphasis that implied a compliment in Miss Carrington's words; Miss Carrington was sorry to find her able to fence.

"I wanted to do something, and Mr. Latham was kind enough to let me work for him. My home is near New York."

"Are you alone in the world, such a pretty child as you?" Miss Carrington's tone expressed sympathy.

"I have a few cousins; no one else," said Anne. She looked up confidently into the keen eyes above her. "The war was hard on me. No, not a personal grief; I lost no one, there was no one in it that I dearly loved," she anticipated Miss Carrington's question. "But it made me feel that everything I knew wasn't so, and the bleakness——" She checked herself with a shudder. "But after that I saw that everything that I had known was a thousand times truer than I had thought it was. I suppose everyone went through that experience, but to each of us it was like being born, wasn't it?"

"Ah!" murmured Miss Carrington, emphatically but discreetly. She had not known this melding with impersonal agony.

"Oh, yes, of course it was what we all felt," Anne hastily disclaimed difference between herself and the rest of the world. "Then I wanted to do something in this burdened world, even though peace, of a sort, had come."

"So you help a blind poet? How wonderfully beautiful," said Miss Carrington, gently. "You are not half known; we all took you for his paid secretary."

"Oh, so I am, I am!" cried Anne, distressed. "Did I convey anything else? Mr. Latham is not an object of charity. I am in his employ. But—well—I want to do my best for his work, and"—she laughed shyly, but with pretty mischief, that did not hide her pity for Richard—"I am only his eyeglasses, but I don't want the glasses to pinch, you see?"

"I see," assented Miss Carrington. "You mean, since someone must serve him in lieu of his lost eyes, you want to see to it that it is someone devoted to him. I still think it is wonderful. How did you hear of him, or he of you?"

"There was an artist here last summer who is Mr. Latham's closest friend. He is a very good artist——"

"Edwin Wilberforce?" interrupted Miss Carrington. "Decidedly he is. I would not speak so temperately of him; he is a famous and great painter. Did he find you for his friend?"

"He——Yes," said Anne. Apparently she was going to say more, but thought better of it. "He told Mr. Latham of me, after he had written me about Mr. Latham, so it was arranged through him that I was to come, and here I am."

"A most fortunate arrangement," said Miss Carrington. "I never saw Richard Latham look so alive, so happy, so——My dear, he is a charming man! I am a selfish woman; people who reach my age through years of solitude are likely to be, but to be so young, with your mind, your heart to devote to a life so highly endowed, yet so denied, is a lot that guardian angels might envy! Richard Latham can never again be pitied, having you."

Anne straightened herself, her eyes widened with a startled look. She opened her lips to speak, but closed them mutely. Miss Carrington implied everything that she longed to deny, yet left her no opening for denial.

"You are far too kind, Miss Carrington," Anne said after a moment. "Mr. Latham should not be pitied; he is indeed highly endowed. But as to my help, it is only eyes and hands at his service and these are common possessions."

"Not stupid, makes no mistakes," thought Miss Carrington, appraisingly, as she glanced at Anne. "Decidedly I must get Kit away." Aloud she said: "I was surprised and pleased to find my boy with Mr. Latham. I offered to take Kit to see our

poet only the other day. It was satisfactory to find him already with him, even on friendly terms. He is a nice boy; it is not my partiality that says it."

"He is an uncommonly nice boy," assented Anne so readily that her frankness left Miss Carrington uncertain whether it were indifference, or the most effectual disguise. "He did not introduce himself to Mr. Latham; little Anne Berkley brought him. Isn't she a marvellous sprite? I never knew a child like her."

"She is the other Cleavedge celebrity," smiled Miss Carrington. "I hope we shall not spoil her. Kit is not a brilliant boy, but he has a good mind, and a still better heart."

"Which is a better thing to have," said Anne. "I don't know him well enough to pronounce, but I should think they were equal in him. Mr. Carrington seems to me one of the rare people who are sane, normal, clever, and kind. He was really beautiful toward Mr. Latham to-day—showed him exactly the right deference combined with frank friendliness. He is just what Mr. Latham likes and needs."

"Enthusiastic praise, my dear, but Kit deserves it, if you can trust the judgment of one who is to all intents and purposes his mother. I not only dote on him, but I mean to make him a man who will be felt in the world. I expect him to marry a brilliant girl whom he has known for years, who will push his fortunes. I think one of these fine days we shall all be proud of Christopher Carrington."

Anne looked at her steadily, surprise in her brown eyes. She wondered why this should be told her. She had not known Kit long, but when she saw him the air around her was charged with a feeling that she had avoided analyzing, not admitting to herself that it was there. But now the sense of something that surrounded Kit arose in her memory and insisted on its association with Miss Carrington's confidence.

"Proud of him by and by?" Anne said. Her colour had

deepened, but her eyes were as frank as girls' eyes can be while they think what must be hidden. "Aren't you proud of your nephew now, Miss Carrington? I'm sure you are, and that you should be."

Miss Carrington set Anne Dallas down at Richard Latham's door. The others had not returned yet. "And Kit will be asked in for tea! Why didn't I arrange for them to come to me for tea, where I could both watch and ward?" she thought.

She bade Anne an affectionate good-night, begging her to pity an old woman, and come to cheer her loneliness with her pretty ways and face. But when she got home she told Minerva as she removed her coat, that "decidedly she should send at once for Helen Abercrombie to visit her."

"Well, if you ask me," said Minerva with asperity, "I would say that when you've exposed a film time and again, and not got any impression on it, you may as well put in a fresh roll."

## CHAPTER V

### *Small Furthering Breezes*

MISS CARRINGTON was much struck by Minerva's figure of speech. She pondered it in her room, feeling that it embodied wisdom.

She was so much struck with it that—to carry it further—she turned over in her mind other films, but none of them fitted her camera, or promised her the picture which she wished to take. She knew many pretty girls, several wealthy ones, a few intellectual and well-bred ones, but she knew no other one who united all these qualities, plus her father's increasing influence to get for Kit a successful career, as did Helen Abercrombie.

She dismissed each candidate as she reviewed her, and sat down to urge upon Miss Abercrombie a speedy repetition of her visit to Cleavage, with such eloquence that on the fourth day after the note was dispatched Miss Carrington was able to announce to Kit that Helen would be with them within ten days.

Kit received the news with dismay. He knew that all his ingenuity, and he had his full share of skill in getting out of things, would not enable him to escape the curtailment of his freedom entailed by the presence of Helen Abercrombie as a guest in his home.

"The shackles of civilization" is not an empty phrase. Kit foresaw the difficulty with which he should escape the entanglements of courtesy to his aunt and her guest. He knew that he should have all sorts of cobweb footfalls set for him, binding him fast when he would go to catch a glimpse of Anne Dallas. He

recognized in himself a desire to see the girl that made it to all intents and purposes a necessity.

"It will be pleasant, Kit, my dear, to have Helen here in the spring," remarked his aunt. "You will feel that inspiration of the season which Tennyson has embodied for us in lines no less true for being hackneyed. Remember, my boy, that I've made my plans for you clear, and that I expect them to be carried out. Helen is a magnificent specimen of the best type of woman that our race has produced; even were she less fortunate in material ways, she would still be a wife upon whom to build a family. There is no reason why you should not be enchanted with the hope of looking at her all your days, and that's no trifle! It's a great thing, let me tell you, to know that the person you marry will always be an agreeable object before you at breakfast, as well as at high, hot noon. It is inconceivable that Helen could ever be a careless creature whose hair straggled or whose collars sagged. A boy doesn't consider these matters which later set a man's nerves on edge; they do more toward making marriage a failure than the affinity of which novelists talk—though I'm ready to concede that the affinity is likely to attend upon these subtle causes of estrangement. It is as easy to love the right woman as the wrong one, once you set your mind to it, Kit. So set your mind to loving Helen; she is preëminently the right woman for you."

Kit did not reply. He took his hat and went out of the house in a melancholy mood. He distinctly did not want to marry Helen, and the more his aunt urged the marriage upon him, with the disenchanting hint of her power to punish him for thwarting her, the less he wanted to marry Helen.

"I'm going down to the Berkleys'," he thought. "They are the happiest, least worldly people I know."

He found Joan at her mother's spending the day there with her baby, little Barbara, named for her young grandmother and

promising to have Mrs. Berkley's sunny temperament and unobtrusive philosophy which made her take most things as a point in the game. Mrs. Berkley played her game straight, a generous winner, a good loser.

Kit was so cast down that he was glad to hear Joan's laugh and her baby's shout of glee as he entered; they were intensely happy and complete. It was not precisely with regret that he found Anne Dallas with Joan, holding the incense jar while the young mother swung the censer before the leaping, crowing object of their worship. Such wholesome, natural happiness permeated the room that as Kit came into it his spirits rose with a swift reaction from their depression. He said to himself: "I'll be damned if I will!" with such force that for an instant he feared that he had spoken aloud.

Anne Dallas greeted him pleasantly, without any sign of especial interest in his coming. Joan was more cordial; she liked Kit a great deal, and was so happy that when the baby was on her knee she absent-mindedly caressed all the world, identifying it with Barbara, who was so large a part of it.

Little Anne fell on Kit with vehement welcome. She gave him her hand with such desire in her eyes to give him more that Kit took it, kissing her cheek.

"I'm just as glad as I can be that you came!" declared little Anne. "I'd like to have you come just purp'slv to see me. You didn't, did you?"

"I came because I was rather down at the heels, in my mind, little Anne, and this is headquarters for getting reshod," said Kit, smiling on the child, but glancing toward Anne Dallas, "and you're no small part of the Berkley cheer. I counted on you to brace me up. Some day, if you'll let me, I'll come to see you, just *you*, ask for *you*, and get shown in to see *you*. How's that?"

"Beautiful!" sighed little Anne. "No one ever came to see me like that—not yet."

"Why should you be cast down, Kit?" asked Joan with her motherly young smile. "I always think of you as the Fortunate Youth, like Harry Warrington."

"Say, Joan, that's a better hit than you aimed to make!" cried Kit. "Harry Warrington wasn't all around fortunate, and when he'd ceased to be a youth he must have been conscious of what he'd missed."

Joan had a glimmer of a suspicion of the true cause of Kit's depression; she glanced at Anne Dallas with the light of her suspicion in her eyes, but Anne said unconsciously:

"What nice old fogies you are to be so familiar with your Thackeray! I shouldn't catch your allusion but that I read 'The Virginians' to Mr. Latham quite lately. And I found Thackeray greater, even in that book, than any one else."

"You'll be all right, Kit; you need not worry. As long as you see straight it will be all right with you. Harry Warrington was a stupid youth," said Joan, hedging for safety, being uncertain of her ground.

"I suspect all youths are stupid," said Kit. "My aunt considers me so. I've just had a lecture on The Whole Duty of Man, and it depressed me. The great A stands for autocrat, as well as Anne."

Little Anne clapped her hands and jumped up and down, crying:

"Great A—your aunt! Little A—me! Bouncing B—that's Babs; look how she jounces herself up and down! There's no cat in the cupboard who can't see, though!"

"There's a Kit in the cupboard, shut up with the mice!" Kit shouted the words on his explosive laugh. "And the great A certainly thinks he's blind! Say, little Anne, Mother Goose with Anne sauce isn't half bad!"

"It's fine!" little Anne approved him. "Though I don't exactly understand the joke. We've so many Annes in Cleav-

edge that it's—do you know what? An Anthology. That's what Peter-two said. Cleavedge is an Anthology. Peter made that joke; it's a pun; Peter-two likes puns."

"You don't know what that means," said Kit.

"I do! I do, too!" little Anne flatly contradicted him, taking a running leap that landed her sharp little knees on Kit's legs and made him wince. "An Anthology's a book with lots of things collected into it, like poetry, or fairy stories, or—oh, things that you can put together in one book. I do know!"

"You certainly do!" Kit admitted, handsomely. "Anne, sometimes I'm afraid you're too learned; it's fearful to be erudite."

"I don't know what that is," said little Anne. "Anthology's not such a dreadfully long word—multiplication is one count longer and all children say it's easy! Mother says it's all what you hear and learn. She says it's the same about thinking; it's just's easy to think about big things as little ones, and good things as bad ones; that's what she says. She says it's all what you're used to. And my mother tells me about big things quite often."

"She does, I know; you frequently allude to them," said Kit, abstractedly.

He was looking at the lovely group across the room: the leaping, gurgling baby; the two fair, flushed young women with the same look on their faces, a look that Kit found natural in Joan, but awesome and mysterious in Anne Dallas, a prophecy that quickened his breath.

"I've an Anthology," said little Anne, taking Kit's face between her palms with no intention of allowing his thoughts to wander from her. "It's the one Joyce Kilmer made. There's a poem in it about Michael the Archangel. You can hear it rush, and it shines. We say a prayer after Mass. It begins: 'St. Michael, the archangel, defend us in battle.' I love it. When

we say it I can just see him on account of that poem. A lady wrote it. Her name is Katharine Tynan, but she's called Mrs. Hinkson now because she married him. Now listen! I'm going to say two verses for you, the two which make me breathe so hard, and you see if you don't love, *love 'em!*

*'His wings he hath put away in steel,  
He goes mail-clad from head to heel;  
Never moon-silver hath outshone  
His breastplate and his morion.*

*His brows are like a battlement,  
Beautiful, brave, and innocent;  
His eyes with fires of battle burn—  
On his strong mouth the smile is stern.'*

"Isn't that great, *great!*" Little Anne caught her breath in a sob. "Isn't he beautiful, and awful? I'm not afraid of him; I'd like to go with him, anywhere."

"You wouldn't be afraid of any one who fought for the right, little Anne," said Kit, somewhat embarrassed by this child's demands upon him. "And that poem is in Joyce Kilmer's Anthology? Well, he himself fought for the right."

"Oh, yes!" Little Anne clasped and unclasped her hands. "He went scouting to find where the dang'rous enemy was hiding, and they found him lying, just as if he was looking over the edge. He was looking for Germans. They were devilish, weren't they?"

"We thought so, little Anne," said Kit.

"Well, what do you suppose it felt like?" Anne went on. "I've wondered and wondered. It makes me shake. He was looking for Germans, and they shot, and there was God Almighty!"

"Annel" gasped Kit, honestly shocked.

Little Anne misinterpreted his exclamation. She raised to him her dark eyes burning in her white face; deep hollows were suddenly graven below them.

"Isn't it?" she whispered. "Just like that! He was looking for devils and there was God! And I think He just said, 'You nice, brave boy!' And Joyce Kilmer got right up and ran over to Him. But he left his body looking down over the edge, because they found it there. It makes me cold!"

Anne's hands were icy as she caught Kit around the neck and hid her face on his shoulder; her body was shaking.

"There, there, little Anne, don't! I wouldn't think such things; they aren't good for you. It's all over," Kit said.

He looked appealingly across to Joan and Anne Dallas, who did not heed him; the baby at that moment had captured her mother's scissors.

Little Anne straightened herself and stared at Kit in amazement.

"Why, of course it's good for me! It's *very* good for my soul to think of it, and I love to feel so cold, and to shake the way that makes me shake! It's noble shaking; not common scared. If ever I'm a nun I'll meditate and meditate! You get up in the middle of the night to when you're a Carmelite, and I think I'll be Carmelites, they're the strictest——"

"Anne! Anne Berkley!" Peter's indignant voice interrupted Anne from upstairs, calling over the banisters.

"Yes, Peter-two," said little Anne, getting down from Kit's lap and going serenely toward the door.

"Who let out all the hens? I'll bet I know!" growled Peter.

"Oh, yes; so do I," said little Anne. "It was me, Petey, but they didn't go away. They stayed around; I watched 'em—a while."

"Yes, a while!" Peter scorned her. "How long? Didn't father say I had no business to keep hens in town, and I'd have

to give 'em up if they annoyed the neighbours? They're annoying them all right, all right! Over at Davis's next door scratching up the last lettuce leaf this minute, and all their peas done for! Now dad'll make me sell 'em, after I've bought feed at the price it was all winter, and now it's spring and the hens were going to pay back some of it! And I was going to set 'em!"

"And have dear little fluffy chicks? I know, Peter dear; you told me," cried Anne with feeling. "Oh, you don't think father'll be so cruel as to stop us?"

"*Us!* Well, I like your nerve!" Peter's contempt was beyond his power of expression. "Sure he'll make me sell 'em. What in the dev— what made you let 'em out? Of all the contemptible tricks! And of all troublesome, meddlesome children! They spoil you, Anne Berkley. You're a spoiled kid, and I hate to think what'll become of you."

"You shouldn't swear, Peter," said Anne with the calm dignity of an archbishop. "Of course I'm not spoiled. Do you think my father and mother could? They wouldn't be seen spoiling me! And the reason I let those hens out, if you want to know, is because one got her head through the wire, and we thought she'd choke to death. Monica was with me. Her eyes just goggled out and her neck got as long! It was fearful! It made us sick to shove her back, but we did. Then we knew if one got choked they all might, so we let 'em out, and I meant to tell you, but I forgot. We watched 'em for goodness knows how long, and they just kept around as harmless! Don't you worry about father, Peter-two! I'll tell him how it happened, and he'll understand. He'll buy the Davises some more lettuce and peas and things. I'll get him to let you keep the hens, Peter-two; don't you worry!"

"And you're not spoiled! Oh, no. Not a-tall!" growled Peter, returning to his room to prepare for the merry sport of driving his hens out of a neighbour's garden.

The worst of it to Peter's mind was that he knew that Anne would be able to do precisely as she promised, that her explanation would mollify, if not amuse, his father, and that Peter would keep his hens through her intercession. The thought infuriated him. He turned back to the stairway and called down:

"You get a move on you and come help me head those hens, or they'll go down to the city hall and dig out the statue of old Carrington on the mall!"

"Oh, Peter-two, take care! That's Kit's great-grandfather, or somebody, and he's here!" remonstrated Anne in a shocked voice, as one always right.

Anne Dallas and Joan managed to have their faces hidden in the baby's preparations for departure when little Anne came back, but Kit was caught in throes of laughter. He was waiting to walk home with Anne Dallas.

"I hope you don't mind, Kit?" little Anne said, anxiously. "Peter-two wasn't hitting at your great-grandfather's statue, or whoever he is; he meant me and the hens. I'm sorry mother wasn't home, but I did enjoy your call, Mr. Carrington." She gave Kit her hand with the air of a fine lady.

Anne Dallas and Kit turned down the street in the May sunshine, with constraint between them that both found difficult to break up.

They discussed little Anne till there was no more to say, even on this fruitful subject, and they talked of Mr. Latham, a theme to which Anne rose with animation.

"My aunt was telling me something that you said to her which I could not understand," said Kit. "You told her the war had hit you hard, and you seemed to connect that with your work for Latham. I was curious as to where the connection could be. Do you mind my asking? Is it a secret?"

"No, it's harder to explain than secrets are," smiled Anne.

"It's not connected, except as I make it so. You see, Mr. Carrington, I have a wee income, but I could make it suffice for my living—that is if I lived so that it would suffice! I doubt you'd think I could. I suppose I'd have gone on living on it, for I'm not an ambitious person; I'm naturally inclined to ignoble content with little ways and little days! But when the war came I—well, as you put it, I was hard hit! It wasn't as if I were grief-stricken. I had no one in it. But it was as if I had everyone out of it! I mean it took the heart of the things which were most important. I was too young to keep my balance. I got it back, or a new one that I hope, I know, will stand a strain when it comes. When my confusion of mind was set straight, then I knew that I must not sit down in sloth all my life, calling it pretty, misleading names, like 'contentment,' 'humility,' anything lulling. I made up my mind to use any slight ability that I had and try to——" She hesitated.

"Help," Kit said, softly.

"Well, at least not grow inward," Anne admitted. "That's all. I couldn't explain all this to Miss Carrington. It does sound silly, but that's only because I'm not able to do important work. It wouldn't sound foolish if I were going to—what was it that little Anne was saying to you? Be a Carmelite? Something like that, you know."

She looked up at Kit with her brown eyes shy and abashed, but he did not seem to consider her silly.

"To be eyes to the blind, to help a poet write what Mr. Latham writes—or I hear that he does; I don't honestly know much about it yet—seems to me pretty fine," he said. "Aunt Anne told me that the painter, Wilberforce, got you to undertake Latham."

"Yes," Anne assented. "Now, Mr. Carrington, why were you so blue when you came this afternoon? Do you want to 'trade,' as children say? I told you my secret."

"Oh, how can I?" Kit blushed to his hair. "All that I could tell you would sound like a spoiled, selfish kid! Aunt Anne has a guest coming, a young lady, and I've got to see it through, and I hate it! That's about all." Kit checked the violence with which he had brought out the word "hate," and ended with a modification of the truth.

"Ah?" Anne raised her eyebrows. She thought that she saw more than Kit said, remembering what Miss Carrington had hinted of Kit's prospects for marriage.

"But that ought not to be tragic!" Anne continued with a laugh. "It does sound like a boy who had had too much his own way! The only thing for you to do is to make the guest's way your way. When you are both young that surely is easy to do! Is she pretty?"

"No, she isn't! She's a beauty," grumbled Kit with such an effect of this being the unpardonable sin that Anne laughed outright. "And her way can't be my way. That's what Aunt Anne wants me to do: make our way parallel. I won't! Don't you give me the same advice!"

"I should not dream of giving you advice, Mr. Carrington," said Anne with a funny, mischievous little look that further infuriated Kit. "Why should I? Nor shall I let you imply complaint of that doting old lady who is plainly wrapped up in her one affection—you! I've no doubt that she knows what's good for you. Good-bye. And pray don't gloom at your guest as you're frowning on me now, for she won't be out of doors where she can run if she gets too frightened. Fancy being shut up in the house with such an ogre as you look this minute!"

Anne put out her hand with a friendly smile, and Kit abandoned his intention to resent her making game of him.

He smiled at her instead, and joined in her laughter.

"Good-bye," he said. "I'm coming around to talk to Mr. Latham. I need literature."

## CHAPTER VI

*"The Face That Lit the Fires," etc.*

**W**HAT table decorations would you suggest, Kit? The drawing room is more important but I thought we might carry out the same flower scheme throughout, even to the bedroom. What do you advise?" Miss Carrington waited for Kit's reply with evidences of extreme solicitude; she knew the value of personal responsibility, that it aroused interest in a pie to feel one had a finger in it.

Kit looked honestly puzzled.

"What are the decorations for, Aunt Anne? What's on?" he asked.

"My dear boy! As though you didn't know that Helen was coming! That's the sort of event one doesn't forget." Miss Carrington was arch.

"Oh, Jemima! I thought she came on—— Great Scott, so this is Thursday! I had it in my head it was Wednesday." Kit's dismay was comical. "I don't know what sort of flowers she likes. They're all right, any of 'em."

"Don't you think yellow blossoms? Helen is such a golden-tinted girl. Jonquils aren't to be had. Roses? But they are not imaginative." Miss Carrington bowled over her ten pins as fast as she set them up. "I particularly like to have flowers which declare themselves thought-out, selected for their suitability."

"Orchids," muttered Kit, crossly. "No, yellow jasmine. Isn't that the stuff that is so unnaturally heavy-scented?"

"Long sprays of jasmine with ferns, and over across the room

great white roses!" Miss Carrington looked delighted. "Yellow jasmine is the very thing! Helen is so wonderfully graceful. I'll tell her it was your suggestion, Kit. Helen has acquired all the modern ways, independence, equality of mind, and that sort of thing, but a woman is always a woman below the fashions of the varying periods; Helen will be gratified that you were perceptive of her peculiar charm."

"Well, Aunt, if you tell her of course I'll have to stand for it; I can't explain, but the heavy-scented jasmine wouldn't be my choice as a representative, if I were a girl. What time is she coming? Shall you meet her?" asked Kit.

"She gets here on the 4:12. I'll send the car, but you'll go down with it, I assume," Miss Carrington implied that her remark was superfluous.

Kit shook his head hard. "Couldn't possibly to-day," he said. "I had it in my head that to-day was Wednesday, and I told Antony Paul I'd go with him to see a dog he's dickering for. He asked me yesterday. It won't matter; I'll be in long before dinner."

"Can't you call Antony Paul and defer the dog's inspection?" Miss Carrington admitted Kit's authority on dogs, for which he had a reputation.

"Antony's got an option only till this afternoon. Another man's waiting to gobble the pup if Tony drops him. Oh, come, now, aunt, it isn't necessary for me to go to the station; you're Helen's hostess, and for that matter, I'd back Noble against the world as a chaperon or guardian."

Kit grinned, cheerful over this small victory.

"I suppose you do not need to be told that one doesn't meet a guest either as her guardian or chaperon. Courtesy is valuable, Kit! And a warm welcome is pleasant to us all. But since you've promised young Paul it cannot be helped; I'll meet Helen. Try to be at home early, please."

Miss Carrington went away to order the jasmine, and Kit departed to join Antony Paul at lunch, and then go with him to the suburban kennels to inspect the pup that was intended to grow up with baby Barbara.

It was a most promising dog Kit declared when he had looked it over, and managed to rescue his glove from the youngster's white teeth, not so damaged but that it could be worn home, provided he remembered to hold the thumb well against his coat.

Antony bought the pup and Kit bade it a cordial good-bye, holding its uneasy head between his palms as he looked into the purplish eyes, in process of change from blue to brown.

"You've done me a favour, small dog, and I'll do one for you when chance offers," said Kit. "I suspect I've done you a favour already in helping you to a home with Antony and nice Mrs. Antony."

"Here, stop undermining me in my dog's affections!" protested Antony. "That pup has no use for me while you're around."

"Dogs and I are natural pals," said Kit, releasing the puppy. "The trolley leaves on the even hour, Tony; we've got to get right out after it."

Warned by a shrill whistle they ran for their car from the corner. They made it and established themselves on the platform, lighting up their cigars and recovering breath.

"Dogs and I do get on," Kit reverted. "I like them, though that's a fool remark. Most men do."

"Not all, though. How they keep off it beats me," said Antony Paul. "When you want to say the best possible things about a man you attribute to him the qualities every good dog has, but not every good man, or men who are accounted good by themselves and others. Loyalty, fidelity, generosity, forgivingness, hero-worship, unfaltering love, patience, admiration, confidence—these are the things every good dog gives us. And

intelligence! What a fine dog doesn't know! It's amazing the way they understand you. I had a dog once, the best comrade a fellow could have asked. When I——"

Kit knew what happened when people started on anecdotes of their pets. He ruthlessly interrupted Antony.

"Yes, I know; that's the way I feel about dogs," he said.

He turned and knocked his cigar ashes over the end of the car, carefully, as if the trolley platform were carpeted.

"But you know, Antony," Kit continued the conversation with his own end in view, "a lot of people seem to think it's all poppycock to look for things like that in humans. People, experienced people, you know, whose opinion ought to count, tell you it's sentimental to insist on—well, on marrying for love, you know. They say take a nice girl, a suitable girl, one that isn't going to get on your nerves, of course, and marry for expediency. They say that this kind of an arranged partnership holds out better than the kind that is not arranged, that flies, so to speak, a winged thing from the start. What do you say about it? You're married to the nicest sort of a girl; of course you fell in love with her; any one would love Joan Berkley, but you've got sense, and by this time you must have perception of what various sorts of marriages could be. What do you say? Do you think it's better to go in for romance? All decent young chaps have a leaning toward it, I think."

Antony looked at Kit sharply.

"As a rule, Christopher, my son, you are not given to abstract speculation. What's up? Or don't you care to tell me?" he said.

"I wouldn't mind, only it's currish to talk, you know," said Kit. "Aunt Anne has ideas about me which I don't share; that's about the sum of it. She urges me to ambition, and she thinks marriage would land me at the top of the heap. The top of the heap is all right, but I can't see her road to reach it."

Antony and Joan had discussed Helen Abercrombie when she

had made her previous visit to Cleavedge. It required no great perspicacity to see that Miss Carrington desired her for Kit. If Helen Abercrombie were the sort of girl that Kit wanted, that would be his business, but it seemed to this youthful pair of Kit's friends that Helen was not for him. Now, as Antony looked at Kit, he saw that Helen was decidedly not the girl that Kit wanted. He said:

"Well, Kit, old man, as to the top of the heap being a better berth than the side, or maybe the foot, that would depend entirely on what suited your constitution, or whether you found more briars at the top, or farther down. I don't think ambition as an end is worth what a man sacrifices for it. It's a means, not an end; the part you play in the world. As to romance, to my mind it's about the one real thing there is. That's only another way of saying that life's pretty punk when you strip it of ideals. And as to marriage without love—now I don't mean the stuff people call love and eventually haul into divorce courts to make room for the next case of it, but what you and I mean when we use the word—I think marriage without it comes mighty close to sacrilege. It would bring a heavier penalty than you could carry around. I'm a lucky man, Kit, but perhaps it's not altogether luck. Joan and I are truly married, but we didn't blunder on our happiness accidentally; we went after it right. Trouble wouldn't sicken us of each other. If Joan broke down and got—well, not downright ugly, because how could she?—but lost her looks, she'd still have her loveliness in my eyes. And when I'm an old grouch, or if I go stone broke, Joan won't get sick of me. It's the real thing, founded on the biggest thing there is. My advice to you, Kit, is to keep off! You're not a fellow to put up with less than the right marriage. It's a solemn risk to tie yourself up for life to one person, and I tell you right now I'd hate to take it on ambition. If you're in love with the girl, that's another matter; then you wouldn't

marry her for ambition, but for love of her, same as if she were a poor girl. You'll repent in dust and ashes if you marry a woman that you don't love. More especially in ashes! You needn't mention to Miss Carrington that I said so, but the prizes you'd get at the price of your ideals wouldn't look to you better than a brass scarf pin in a package of popcorn. Selah!"

"Much obliged, Antony," said Kit, looking grave, though he laughed. "I suppose everyone considers his own brand of happiness the right one; that's only another way of saying it's perfect happiness. But I seem to have a lot of faith in your judgment. I'd take your advice sooner than almost any one's. You're able to look out of your own windows to see the other fellow's view. I suspect you're right. It's a funny thing that one person attracts us and another person doesn't! Perfectly all right person, too! You don't want her though she's handsome, desirable enough. But——"

"But you don't desire her! There you are. And that's good and sufficient proof that there's where you ought to stop. It's no funnier than that Joan tucks away whole saucerfuls of strawberries, and is ready to cry for more, while if I eat the smallest saucerful of them I'm crying *from* them, not for them. It's our digestion, our acids, our fitness, Kit! Don't swallow a person who is not to your palate; you'll be fatally ill if you do, my son," preached Antony.

"Cannibalistically put, but sound doctrine, Reverend Father Antony Paul!" said Kit. "And what shall you call the dog?"

"Guard, short for Guardian," said Antony, promptly. "I'm getting him to guard Barbara when she begins her excursions into a dangerous world."

Kit got into the house quietly on his return and went softly to his room, making signals to Minerva, whom he met in the hall, not to betray him. He wanted to set his thoughts in order before he met Helen. He wanted also to dress for dinner.

He heard Helen's silvery, prettily modulated voice as he slipped past his aunt's sitting room. There was no denying that she had many gifts.

When Kit came down an hour later his aunt and Helen were in the drawing room. He looked well with his clear-tinted skin, his fine features set into relief by the expanse of white linen which he wore.

Helen estimated him anew as she arose to greet him. A glance would reveal Christopher Carrington a gentleman; that he could be trusted; that he was kind and upright and that, if he were not brilliant, he had excellent mental powers.

"He does very well," thought Helen, and extended her hand with a hearty friendliness that instantly demolished Kit's barriers and made him slightly ashamed.

It was caddish to have it in mind to refuse a hand that was held out as one boy greets another; after all, Helen might not be cognizant of his aunt's plan, still less coöperating with it.

Kit saw a girl as tall as he was, slender, with perfect dignity and grace of carriage; a handsome face, a well-shaped head upborne with spirit by a rounded neck that had the sweep of line that is best shown by an evening gown. The carefully arranged hair was pale gold in colour; not yellow, but the shade of the palest jonquils.

"She'd look well at a court," thought Kit, involuntarily recalling what his aunt had hinted of a future embassy through ex-Governor Abercrombie's influence. But what he said aloud was:

"Hallo, Helen! You're beating yourself at your own game!"

"Hallo, Kit! It's this becoming gown. You look uncommonly fit, and aren't ugly to-night, yourself," retorted Helen. "It's fine to see you again, nice Kitten! I like to come here because I can do and say and be exactly as I feel!"

"Yes. I don't know another girl to whom I can talk as I do to you, Nell," said Kit, cordially, his old familiarity with her

springing up now that he saw Helen in the body. His aunt's attitude toward her was lost in Helen's own frank attitude toward himself.

Miss Carrington's maid announced dinner and Miss Carrington turned to Kit, all gracious smiles and pleasure as she saw the admiration for Helen in Kit's eyes.

"Take Helen out, Kit. We aren't a party, but she, being guest, may have as much as that of a dinner party," she said.

Helen laughed and drew the elder woman's hand through her arm, patting it as it rested on her diaphanous sleeve which floated from the curves of her beautiful arm.

"Not a bit of it!" she cried. "I'll take you out, or we'll take each other, and Kit can trot along by himself, thanking heaven that two such noble specimens of womanhood allow him to watch their gracious backs."

At dinner Helen chatted merrily with wit and charm on all sorts of subjects, treating Kit and his aunt with much the same kind of friendliness, but giving it to Miss Carrington in warmer degree. She was evidently emancipated from the prejudices of an earlier generation, for she touched on subjects once taboo, treating them as if they were part of daily life without emphasizing them. But Kit remembered that Joan Berkley Paul hardly knew this part of life, and that possibly little Anne would never know it. He thought of Anne Dallas, also, as a sheltered type of mind, as one that sought shelter.

After dinner, when they had returned to the drawing room, Kit asked,

"Does Helen sing to-night?"

"No, Helen doesn't sing to-night; she waits till she has had a night's sleep after her journey, because she makes it a rule not to use her voice when she is tired. Helen talks to Kit and gets his view of some of her problems; Miss Carrington says that she has three unescapable letters to write. Bless her old heart! What

should we do, we women, without heads to ache and letters to write! Of course it's obvious that these letters are for Kit's and Helen's benefit! So come along, Kit! Take me to your particular shrine, where you smoke, for I'm going to smoke and talk with you." She put her hand in Kit's, waiting to be led.

"You're a great one, Nell!" cried Kit. "What others think you say. Aunt Anne doesn't know you smoke."

"Doesn't she? Well, then, she gives herself the benefit of her ignorance. I'm sure she suspects it, with reason! And feels she'd have to protest if she knew it. Funny, when she's so up-to-date, that she minds smoking! So many other things are intrinsically wrong, if you're going to bother about it, and she doesn't mind them, plays and novels and so on."

Helen swung his hand as she talked and they went down the hall to the small room at the end which had been set apart for Kit's use.

Helen threw herself on the couch with careless ease, freeing her narrow feet from the twist of her skirt, and crossing them a little above her pretty ankles.

Kit laid out a box of cigarettes and held a light for Helen, who accepted it with her eyes fastened on his as she drew her cigarette into a glow.

"Fine, Kit! This is the kind I like. Nice boy; you'd never offer me feminine substitutes, would you? Say, Kit, I was looking at you. You're not a genius, but you have sense. I believe I honestly do want your opinion, though I set out to ask it in order to be nice, rather than from actual craving for it," she said.

"Go to it, Helen!" said Kit, throwing himself into a deep chair and his used match into a small hammered dish at the same time. "What's wrong? I suppose I should say: Who is it? since it's a girl's confidence that I'm to receive."

"Oh, piffle, Kit! You know me better than that," cried

Helen. "In fact, it's the opposite sort of confidence. I'm not a bad-looking girl, you know. Kit——" She paused.

"Ripping. Stunning," said Kit.

"And my father is at once a coming man and a man that has arrived," Helen nodded acknowledgment of Kit's interpolation, "so men, several, want to marry me! Kit, I'm trying to decide whether I'll ever marry, or go in for a career. Now, just wait! I've brains as well as looks; I sing well, but not well enough to follow it up too far. My father could get me pretty much anything I wanted. I don't care to marry as most women do. I know precisely its value, both as an arrangement, we'll call it, and as a supplement to a clever, handsome woman's assets. But I can get on without marrying; in fact, I'm not sure I'd be happy married. I think I can reach my goal, in the shape of a career, just as well unencumbered. What would you say to me as a Power, a Lady-with-a-Salon, a Personage to be Reckoned With in the State at Washington? Look here, Kit, wouldn't that be a game to play alone? I'd lose a lot of my winnings with a partner. And besides, I couldn't carry out the game if I married for love. A friendly, able partner would be the only one for that, and they're not common. Men aren't often friendly to a girl who is ripping, as you call it."

"Well, my gracious, Helen, what makes you put it up to me? What do I know about it? And exactly what are you getting at?" cried Kit, perturbed.

"Because, Kit, and you'd have seen this if you weren't the sort you are, there's a man who wants me bad; right away, too! And I don't know. He's richer than the Ind. I like him, but he loves me. That's likely to be a nuisance. It wouldn't do, would it? And I've got to decide pretty soon as to him, and I'd like to decide as to myself, too, and get about my job. It's tiresome to hang along, and time is valuable. Youth for beginnings, you know."

Helen waited, and Kit looked at her from a new angle. He did not know this Helen. He saw her with eyes that viewed her as a man sees a woman who is desired by other men. And how mistaken his aunt had been to think that she was ready to marry him! She was not considering him; she was frankly his old friend who liked, trusted, consulted him. In this rôle he liked her.

"Well, Nell," he said, slowly, "I don't quite see how I can answer you. You're hard on this man, on all the men you know and whom you don't care to marry. It's wasteful for a woman like you, with all you are and have, not to marry, isn't it?"

"Wasteful?" Helen laughed her pretty laugh. "I suppose I may as well tell you the whole story! I'm thinking of 'commencing author,' as our British cousins say. I can write!"

"Sure. You can do anything," said Kit, sincerely.

"Richard Latham lives here. I've never met him, often as I've been to Cleavedge. You know him, don't you? I wish you'd take me to see him, Kit. I'd like his help. I've begun something and I'd like to insinuate myself into his acquaintance till I'd dare ask him what it amounts to." Helen waited, watching Kit under drooping lids.

"That's easy," said Kit, unsuspiciously. "I'll take you there."

"Good boy!" said Helen, lying back against her pillow.

Plainly Kit did not suspect the long, confidential talk in which his aunt and she that afternoon had discussed him and his possible error in taste and judgment.

"Oh, Kit, how I must have bored you! What a good sort you are to be so patient! As if I had to decide my problem the minute I got here! But you did look so sane and reliable when I first saw you! Let's put off the momentous decision of vacillating Helen's fate till the next time—or far longer! I'm getting

sleepy, and your aunt must be through with those fictitious letters."

Helen flung herself off the couch and went out of the room in advance of Kit.

"You smell of cigarettes," said Miss Carrington as they came up to her.

Helen went closer and laid her long hands on the old lady's head, as if to bless her.

"One does when one has been where they are," she said, lightly kissing Miss Carrington's soft white hair. Her breath was not distinguishable in that kiss.

Kit went to his room conscious of having spent a delightful evening. Helen had treated him in the one way that he could have enjoyed; he was grateful to her for having set him at ease, for banishing a dread for which, he was convinced, she was in no degree responsible. Never before had Kit liked Helen Abercrombie as well as to-night.

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## CHAPTER VII

### *The Poet's Corner*

IN THE quiet room, with the sunlight shaded, for the day was warm, Anne Dallas bent over her writing table, absorbed in her work. Richard Latham sat opposite her, dictating slowly, his head resting on his hand, his face turned toward her. If he could have seen one would have said that he was watching Anne, and even though his eyes were sightless the word was not unsuitable. He was so keenly conscious of her movements, and his sensitive mind was so intent upon her, that he perceived her almost as if he saw her.

Yet this vision of Anne helped rather than hindered the dictation of the lines of his play. That her permeation of his thoughts did not get in the way of his developing the imaginary people whom his brain was moving about like puppets, said as nothing else could say how one with him she was, how completely, how selflessly she answered to his need.

Richard Latham was writing a play. It was both comedy and tragedy, as most real dramas are; it was realism, yet idealized as are all lives which are worth living. It was that day reaching the end of its second act.

No one but Anne Dallas had yet heard a line of it. She took it from Richard's lips as it formed in his poet's mind, feeling that she was a part of something unspeakably great; it gave her at once a sense of utter isolation and at the same time a feeling that she was in the midst of crowding splendours which lay beyond the bounds of daily events and their actors.

Anne wondered while she waited for Richard to think out something that he wanted to express exactly, why it was she to whom this experience had fallen. Anne Dallas had not an undue opinion of Anne Dallas. She considered herself one of the majority of average people, not exceeding in face, mind, nor any way, hosts of girls correctly, but tamely, described as "nice girls." Yet it was she and none of the others who was taking down this play to-day, these words and pictures and characters so beautiful that she felt sure that they would live on long after she had grown old and died.

It was after three, and the rule was that work stopped at three, but Richard was dictating the last lines of the second act. It was tense with emotion, complex in situation, and many of the loveliest lines so far in the play were in this scene. It had not occurred to the workers to think of time.

Anne Dallas looked up and saw little Anne Berkley coming up the walk. Her table was beside the window, and she signalled to the child to be quiet. Little Anne at once dropped down on the steps and began to fan herself with her hat, for she understood the ways of the poet from past experience, and knew that she must wait to be admitted.

At last Richard Latham triumphantly cried: "Curtain!" and fell back in his chair, suddenly realizing that he was tired.

"Will it do, Miss Dallas? Could you judge it as you wrote it?" Richard asked.

"Oh, no, not judge it! It does far too well. I could not judge it. It is supremely fine and beautiful; it sweeps one along with it, but I know that it is the best thing that you have done," cried Anne.

"I don't know; I'm afraid it isn't much good," said Richard, despondently. "Oh, Lord! To feel something surging against your brain, your lips, almost as if it literally pushed your ribs

out, then to be tongue-tied, to feel you've played it false when it wanted to be born of you, that you've strangled it at birth, or brought it forth deformed!"

"If you could express all that you feel you would not feel enough to be greatly worth expressing. It is neither slain nor deformed, but to you the wings that bore it to you seem clipped. Perhaps they may be, since your conception of it must exceed words, but you have made the rush of those wings audible to others."

Anne arose as she spoke and rang for tea. She was used to dealing with the poet's reaction from the delight of creation; she understood it.

"How you help me!" Richard smiled at her and put out his hand; Anne's skirt brushed it as she crossed the room.

"It's a hard thing to feel one minute like a tower reaching to heaven, and the next like a toppled card house."

"Yes, it's hard, but it doesn't really matter, because you know it's only nervous reaction. It would matter if you took the tower or the card house seriously, especially the tower! But you never lose your perspective. It's a great deal to be a perfectly sane great poet!" Anne laughed, and added, "Little Anne has been meekly sitting on the steps for some time. I signalled her to wait until you were finished. Shall I call her now?"

"Surely. Little Anne is as good a restorative as tea," said Richard. The little girl came in on her summons with a flushed and happy face; she at once accepted Richard's invitation to perch on the arm of his chair, though she first violently hugged Anne Dallas.

"I've been to instructions," she replied to Richard's question. "Yes, I am warm; I am very warm, I am so warm that I'm boiling hot, only I'm not to say that. It's a pity. I think it's one of the worst things that ain't—are not—sickness, or dying, or

op'rations, or something, that you can't use strong words. I think it makes you hotter'n fury to be just about roasted and say you're warm!"

Richard threw back his head and joined in Anne Dallas's laughter.

"You often remind me of Margery Fleming, little Anne, and it seems that you share her love of strong language! I think myself it's a useful safety valve. What instructions are you getting?"

"I don't mean swearing, not blasphemy," said little Anne, looking shocked by the idea. "I mean words that sort of rip and hit things. I wouldn't swear, not for worlds! And I'm going to First Communion instructions."

Little Anne bent her head as she said this and her thin, flashing, elfin face took on an awed look, awe that her voice expressed.

"At your age?" cried Richard. "Why, Anne, you are too young! When I knew about these things we did not join the church before we were fourteen."

"I don't have to join the Church, I'm in it," said Anne, puzzled. "You're old enough when you understand. And I do understand. Sister Annunciata says I understand enough to make me dreadful 'sponsible if I don't try to be worthy. Though you can't really be, you know. It'll be next month, Corpus Christi; it comes early. Sister says it's often later, but it has to come when Easter makes it. But it's sure to be warm, she says. We'll have white dresses and veils, all alike, so if a girl is kind of not able to get a fancy one, nobody'll know which she is. Anyway, mother says pure white and quite simple is the way we ought to look. It is the happiest day of all my life. No matter what other day I have, presents, or parties, or—no matter what—that's the happiest. How can I wait?"

She threw back her head and lifted toward heaven a rapt, ecstatic little face.

"Do you think it's possible she will feel that is true? Isn't it dangerous to tell her this? I'd be afraid of a disappointment and a disastrous after effect," said Richard to Anne Dallas.

"Oh, no, I think not. Joan would tell us there was no danger. Little Anne's faith is strong. She cannot understand how happy she is to be an innocent child, but later on she will look back to this day and realize that she was one, and that, in very truth, her First Communion day was the happiest one of her life," said Anne, softly.

Little Anne jumped down from the arm of Richard's chair and flew to take Anne Dallas around the neck in a tempestuous embrace.

"Don't be sorry you are grown up, my darling," she cried. "You're not so very much grown up. And you are good! I love you. I'm going to pray for all my dear ones on my First Communion day. You're one! Sister says Our Lord will love to give me what I ask for them. I'm going to ask to be kept a little girl inside me always. Some people are. It's very hot—warm, isn't it? And I see Kit Carrington coming along with a handsome, elegant lady. She's *awfully* handsome! They're turning in here."

"Do you mind being caught, Mr. Latham? Anne is right; they are coming here. You have time to escape," suggested Anne Dallas.

"I don't mind. I like Kit Carrington, and the magnificence of the lady as conveyed by little Anne ought to be enjoyable, even to a blind man. All right, Stetson. Ask them to come in here—or, no, show them into the garden; we'll go there. It *is* warm, little Anne!"

Richard Latham, Anne, and little Anne stepped out from one of the long French windows which gave on the garden from the dining room. Helen Abercrombie and Kit had already reached one of the curved benches beneath the elms which interlaced

their sweeping boughs over the turf of the upper end of the fine old garden.

Helen was such a beautiful figure in her floating white gown, with her drooping, white-plumed hat shading her golden hair as she arose to meet her host that Anne Dallas, as well as little Anne, was dazzled. It seemed a pity that a poet should not be able to look upon such wondrous loveliness.

"Mr. Latham, I brought my aunt's guest, Miss Abercrombie, to see you because—well, she wanted to come! Miss Abercrombie, Mr. Latham," said Kit.

"Miss Carrington would have asked you to come to tea with us, she means to still but I did want to come! Kit is right, and I've no better excuse for intruding to add to his," said Helen, her voice more than ever like a delicate harp blown upon by a breeze.

"Ought you apologize for kindness?" suggested Richard. "I am glad to show you my garden. Kit and Miss Dallas know each—Oh, really, I beg your pardon!" Richard broke off with a shocked gesture. "Miss Dallas, Miss Abercrombie."

Helen bowed. She possessed to perfection the art of grading her bows. This one conveyed to Anne exactly the intended impression of her claim to recognition for service rendered to the public, but not as a social equal.

Anne Dallas returned the salutation quietly. She did not miss its quality, but it did not disturb her. She would not have been a woman, a young woman at that, and not have been conscious to her finger tips of the regal beauty of the girl beside her. She did not know that the juxtaposition was planned by Helen to show Kit the contrast between them, but it made her feel like a dull little weed to know that her simple white gown and her smooth, dark hair were contrasting like homespun against the elegant clothing of the other girl and the radiant head held high above her.

"Kit Carrington will marry her!" thought Anne, ignoring the

stab the thought dealt her. "Mr. Latham, at least, can't see us together." Fresh from the enthusiasm of her day's work, she told herself that Kit did not count if she could hold her place in Richard Latham's mind. But she had to remind herself of this.

"It's not easy to talk to a poet. I have tried to before, but not to one great enough to make it matter how one talked," said Helen, accepting Richard's invitation to the bench under the elms.

"Talk to the man, and never mind the poet!" said Richard. "I am not merely a poet. Therefore I wish that I could see you, Miss Abercrombie!"

"Now I know how well you fill the rôle I'm to play to! I already had your measure on the poet side," laughed Helen. "Who is the child that looks like a changeling? Your niece?"

"This is Miss Anne Berkley, my intimate friend, Miss Abercrombie, but I cannot claim kinship with her except in mind," said Richard, gravely.

"How charming!" said Helen, carelessly. "How do you do, Miss Anne Berkley? Another Anne!"

"I am well, I thank you," said little Anne. "There are many Annes in this place, but we don't know them all, I s'pose. I didn't like it long time ago, but I made an act of it, so I could bear my name, and now I like it."

"What did you make of it?" cried Helen.

"Anne means an act of mortification. She has many curious bits of vernacular from the nuns who teach her; curious to others. That is one of them," explained Anne Dallas.

"How interesting!" said Helen, by this time surfeited of little Anne and not intending to be drawn into conversation with Anne Dallas. Little Anne was quick to feel atmospheres. She flushed and said vehemently:

"The best of all lovely Annes, or anything, is Miss Anne Dallas!"

"Indeed that is true, little Anne, though you and I love each other so well," said Richard Latham. "Miss Dallas stands between me and darkness; between me and silence, between me and inability to do my work, Miss Abercrombie."

"What a beautiful thing to say, Mr. Latham! Miss Dallas must feel recompensed at this moment for all that she has done, all that she will do. Yet I can see how bad it would be for you not to have a good secretary." Helen smiled toward Anne, and over her.

"It would, indeed. But I cannot say that it has ever occurred to me that Miss Dallas was a good secretary," said Richard, slowly. "Are you too tired to walk about? Do gardens bore you?"

"Not such a garden as this one," said Helen, graciously. "Please let Miss Dallas come with us. Kit will look after the little girl. I am sure that you are accustomed to Miss Dallas's guidance."

"That is another profoundly true remark, Miss Abercrombie," said Richard. "You will show our best spots to Miss Abercrombie, in case I pass them, Miss Dallas?"

"Gladly," said Anne, obeying Helen's gesture to walk at her other hand. "But you know we think them all the best! This garden is one of Mr. Latham's loveliest, though least-known, poems."

Little Anne slipped her hand into Kit's and held him back.

"Who is she?" she whispered.

"Like her?" asked Kit, interested in the reply.

Little Anne shook her head hard. "She is like all the things in fairy tales," she said. "She's like a cloth-of-gold, and a fairy princess, she's so beau-ti-ful! But she's something like Cinderella's sisters at the ball. No, I don't like her, not one bit. What does she want to do? Is she going to try to be Mr. Latham's—you know! His writer? What do you call it?"

"Secretary? No, indeed, little Anne! Miss Abercrombie is a royal lady; not even a poet would she serve," said Kit.

"Well, what makes her mean?" asked little Anne, candidly; she had used her keen young eyes and ears to some purpose. "Miss Anne's ever'n' ever so much nicer, and ever'n' ever so much prettier, even if she isn't, because she looks so kind of dear and sweet. I know she's being not nice to my Anne, because when anybody isn't nice to someone I love, and I don't know what it is they're doing, that makes me mad, and I remember my vocation."

"Your vocation, you queer little Anne? What can you mean?" cried Kit.

"Putting beetles on their legs," said the child promptly. "When they get on their backs and can't get over, you know. It makes me feel like that. I do not like her one speck, so there! But I s'pose Sister Annunciata'd say I had to because I'm going to instructions. But ought you like everything, Kit? I think it's fearful to be a saint!"

"Great Scott, little Anne, is that what you're tackling? No wonder you find this sinful old world a puzzle!" Kit's great roar of laughter made the others turn back.

"What has little Anne said now?" asked Anne Dallas with a look of such friendly understanding to Kit that Helen was annoyed.

"Don't tell! Oh, don't, please don't tell!" begged little Anne.

"Surest thing you know I won't tell!" Kit reassured her. "Not now. Sometime when I'm alone with Miss Dallas you won't mind? Because she'd love to know what you said of her."

"She knows! She knows we all love her to pieces!" cried little Anne, seizing Anne Dallas around the waist, to the inconvenience of Helen, who drew her skirt away.

"Is this child an orphan? Why doesn't that Sister something-

or-Other teach her manners?" demanded Helen, indulging her temper at the expense of prudence.

"We find our little Anne's manners most admirable. Her mother is Mrs. Berkley, and she is so lovely that no little girl could have a better model," said Richard, patting little Anne's cheek; it was as hot beneath his hand as he had known that it would be.

Little Anne swallowed hard several times and clasped her hands tight.

"Well, that was a *good* act to offer up!" she said in a choked voice, and her friends had difficulty in restraining their smiles.

"When you are ready, Helen?" suggested Kit. "I suppose you have confided to Mr. Latham the secret that you were planning to tell him?"

"Not this time," said Helen, recovering her smile. "Mr. Latham is coming to tea at your aunt's; then I shall tell him, because there he will be at my mercy."

"Are not men always at your mercy, Miss Abercrombie? Though I cannot see you, I have divined that," said Richard, suavely.

"If you are walking our way, Miss Dallas, won't you come with Miss Abercrombie and me?" Kit suggested.

Again Helen's temper slipped its leash. She turned toward Anne, looking down on the girl who was a half head shorter than Helen.

"Oh, don't you sleep in the house?" she said with so much insolence in the simple words that Richard flushed to his hair, and Kit found himself as hard put to it for self-control as little Anne had been in "making her act."

"Miss Dallas does not sleep at her post; she boards near by, and all day and every day helps me in every way that her charity can devise," said Richard. "Please do not go yet, Miss Dallas. I want your advice as to the next act, but more I want the honour of taking you home myself."

"Good-bye, Mr. Latham," said Kit, grasping his host's hand so tight that he winced. "I'm proud and grateful that you let me come here. Good-bye, Miss Dallas. Come, little Anne; you're going to be taken home by me. Helen? Are you ready?"

Helen made her adieux with her most charming grace, including Anne Dallas in her cordiality. She had allowed her temper to get away from her, but she had no mind to let it be the final impression which she left behind her. She was far too wise to stir men to championship of another girl, however her inferior in wit and beauty that girl might be.

Anne Dallas, with heightened colour, responded quietly to Helen's farewell. She did not betray the slightest annoyance.

"She surpasses in breeding as she does in all other ways," thought Richard, listening to Anne's courteous replies, spoken in her soft alto voice.

"Good-bye, you darlingest! You very sweetest and darlingest!" cried little Anne, hugging Anne Dallas, and voicing what they all felt, though the feeling puzzled the child.

Kit left little Anne at her own door; she had walked in utter silence, holding his hand tight, while Helen chatted cheerfully, ignoring little Anne.

"What a queer, thin, dark, clever little creature!" exclaimed Helen after they had bade the child good-night. "Even bright children bore me. I don't care for crudity in any form. I dare say your least Anne will make a clever woman."

"Well, Nell, I can't recall consulting you about little Anne," said Kit, but so pleasantly that Helen could not resent it.

"Not about either Anne do you mean?" laughed Helen. "That little secretary person is a nice girl. Not particularly interesting, not particularly pretty, but interesting and pretty enough. It's a mutually lucky thing that she is working for Richard Latham. If he marries her it will be quite well—and of course he is going to marry her. He is blind, so more beauti-

ful women won't make him repent it, and his wife will not be criticized as his wife would be if he weren't blind. She would be entirely dutiful, and of course marriage to him will give her a position that she could not otherwise hope to attain. She doesn't strike one as having connections."

"Marry him! Anne Dallas!" cried Kit.

Helen glanced at him.

"Certainly. I should say that it was practically settled now," she said. "Latham would be a step upward for most women, but no one would dream of opposing anything that he wanted. He really is pathetic, so gifted, so handsome, so polished—and so blind! I was not prepared to admire him as I do. It would be wicked to cross him in whatever he desired. I, for one, would not put a straw in the way of his marrying that mousey little secretary, even if I could, and though there are plenty of brilliant women who would gladly devote themselves to him."

Kit did not speak. He walked on whistling behind his closed teeth.

Helen broke the silence:

"I'm afraid I was not quite pretty-behaved there, Kit! Spoiled children are so dreadful, and, till I discovered that the secretary was also the poet's dream and to be Mrs. Latham, I hated meeting her; that's the truth. I don't mean to be a snob, but social equality is such utter nonsense that it ruffles my feathers. I was annoyed that I had to walk with that commonplace girl, and be shown the garden by her! That is, until I discovered her future standing. So I'm afraid I was a bit horrid. I'm sorry! And of course Miss Dallas is all right in her way."

Helen leaned forward to smile into Kit's face.

He threw his head back and away from her.

"Oh, damn—ascus!" he said.

Helen laughed blithely, and tucked her hand into his arm with high good humour.

"You needn't convert your swear words on my account, Kit," she said. "I might use one myself were occasion demanding it. If I was naughty, at least *I* kept my temper, poor Kit! How about it? Did we all?"

"It's a mighty poor thing to keep," said Kit. "Get rid of it. Yes, you sure kept your temper, Nell! That's the kind of temper I remember you had. You've kept it, all right!"

"What a horrid boy you are, Kit Carrington!" cried Helen, delighted, but pretending not to be. "I have not a bad temper; I never fly out. I dislike foolish, tiresome, annoying things, that's all! I've an excellent temper to live with. My father says I'm the easiest woman to get on with he ever knew, and a man who has governed a whole state ought to be a judge of one little disposition! Come on, don't sulk! It would be too stupid to bring an unpleasant atmosphere home with us into your aunt's house."

He looked at her; she was smiling, and was wonderfully handsome. Poor baited Kit, disturbed by Helen's discovery and disgusted with the afternoon, sighed helplessly and gave in.

"You may be the easiest woman to get on with your father ever knew," he said. "From what experienced people tell us that's not a strong statement. It's no fool of a job to handle any woman, they say, and I believe it!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Candour*

MISS CARRINGTON, seated before the hearth in her sitting room and enjoying the wood fire partly because it crackled, partly because it was too warm for the day, heard Minerva moving about in her dressing room and called her.

"Isn't Helen back yet?" she asked.

Minerva appeared in the doorway, disapproval in every line of her black taffeta gown.

"Miss Abercrombie came in three quarters of an hour ago; she went to her room and it's likely is resting there, though not having seen her I am not able to say positively," she replied.

"Oh, well, Minerva, it will never come to a trial for perjury," observed Miss Carrington. "Ask her if she will not join me?"

Minerva withdrew and shortly there appeared in the same doorway a figure in sharp contrast to Minerva's. It was Helen's, tall and lithe, swathed in a pale blue Japanese negligée, heavily embroidered in white and faintest pink. Her golden hair was dishevelled; one hand carried a box of chocolates, the other clutched her robe and a novel.

"Want me?" she asked, and crossed the room as Miss Carrington invited by a gesture to a chair at her side.

Helen took it and piled three down pillows around her, twisting her body into perfect agreement with the pillows.

"How inconsiderate you are not to come without a sum-

mons!" Miss Carrington reproached her. "Aren't stay-at-homes always eager for bulletins from abroad?"

"I thought you'd be napping, or would come into my room if you wanted me," said Helen. "There isn't much to report; a perfectly ordinary visit. Of course the most interesting things about it aren't those that happened."

"Precisely. And your keen eyes would see them," agreed Miss Carrington. "First of all, is there the least ground for my suspicion of Kit?"

"Oh, dear me, yes," said Helen, promptly. "I more than suspect him, but he doesn't suspect himself. He is attracted by the girl; he likes her, is ready to range himself on her side if any one doesn't unreservedly admire her, but the feeling has not taken on alarming proportions. I'm sure he has no notion that he'll fall in love with her if he isn't careful, that the 'goblins will git him if he don't watch out!' He doesn't think she's a goblin, and he isn't clever enough to watch out. Please don't mind me, because you know what I think of Kit! She's a pretty little thing enough, but not more than pretty. And she has a gentle, amiable way with her, unsophisticated and all that. One of those *good* girls! Men are drawn by sweetness and goodness at first, and then, when they have to live with it, they are sure to be drawn by the other thing! Beauty unadorned, beauty of character, is pretty deadly daily diet, Aunt Anne-elect!"

Miss Carrington laughed. "These are not original remarks, Helen, though they may be the result of your original research," she said. "The point is not how wise you are, nor how accurate a prophet, but what Kit thinks of her."

"Oh, well, do you suppose Kit thinks of her?" Helen asked, lightly. "It strikes me that it is only that she is here, and nobody else is, most of the time. There must be lots of pretty girls in a place this size, but this little brown thing is new. I suppose she must have brains, for Richard Latham finds her the

greatest help; he spoke of her as marvellously perceptive, says her criticisms are a great help to him. But Kit has been drawn to her simply because—he is! That's the only reason it ever happens, of course! And I don't imagine he has thought about her; not actual, appraising thoughts. She is essentially feminine. I am dead sure he is attracted to her, but I'm also sure he isn't analyzing himself, nor her, and it ought to be possible to divert his attention. Have a chocolate?" Helen extended her box.

Miss Carrington accepted a chocolate with a twinkle in her eye and a laugh that was not wholly flattering to her guest.

Helen's embroidered robe had fallen to the floor on each side of her; her white skin gleamed above and through the thin crêpe and lace of her underclothing; her white, lace-trimmed skirt was drawn tight above her knees as she sat back in the chair; her thin, lustrous silk stocking outlined the beautiful curve of her leg.

"If Kit could see you now he might be diverted," said Miss Carrington.

In her youth, with girls of her own age, she had never been so unreserved.

"Call him in," suggested Helen. "I'll tell you in confidence, Miss Carrington, that I never found a trusting youth hard to divert, if I went about it."

"What did Thackeray say? That any woman could marry any man if she had sufficient opportunity and had not a positive hump? Something like that in *Vanity Fair*."

"Anticipating G.B.S.? I remember Shaw better than Thackeray. I read *Vanity Fair* when I was about fourteen. Of course everyone admits that the woman chooses, but how about two women choosing the same man, each with the 'sufficient opportunity?' Then it does seem as though the man cast the deciding vote, though that would be only another way of saying

that one woman had the stronger attraction. I never heard that threshed out. It's interesting, opens out vistas. The only thing I've heard that might bear on it is that once seven women laid hold of one man. I don't know what came of that. I haven't read the Book that's in much, not even at fourteen!" Helen laughed, throwing herself back and crossing her ankle on her knee as if she had been a man.

Miss Carrington did not smile. Her brow contracted slightly, and her eyes did not applaud Helen.

"You funny old dear!" Helen cried. "When you are so emancipated, boast of your modernity, read the books, novels and philosophy, love the plays you do, why do you suppose you are half-scared of me at times? And you are. I jar you."

"A matter of taste, Helen," admitted Miss Carrington. "I was bred up in old-fashioned conservatism. I can theorize; I don't mind the new ideas in print, on the stage, provided they are cleverly put, but I admit that I like to see young women what I was trained to consider well-mannered. I don't defend my inconsistency; I'm explaining myself."

"Atavism; Shintoism," said Helen, carelessly. "No one is consistent. Taste is stronger than principles, I've always noticed that. It will take two generations to get our mental clothing fitted, and by that time the fashion will probably swing back; that's the way it works. You've got your grandmother's and mother's minds grafted on your mind. You've survived; you were born before the old ways had passed. But to return to our muttons, which means the Dallas lambkin: Richard Latham is in love with her himself."

"Oh, Helen, do you think so?" cried Miss Carrington.

"Know so," Helen corrected her. "And I warned Kit. I went so far as to try to ingraft upon his trusting mind the suggestion that no one would snatch her from a man so important to the world, so afflicted as the poet. I hoped that it would

seem to him later that he had thought of that himself. And, really, Miss Carrington, Richard Latham is a peach of a man, aside from his poetry. He is charming; modest, clever, gentle, and you feel that he is stainless. I wondered for a moment if it wouldn't be worth while rescuing him, instead of Kit, from the little Dallas? I could put him on a pinnacle, give him the rewards of his genius while he lived, instead of after he is dead. I could do it alone, and I am always plus father. But I decided it would be a pity to waste my looks on a blind man."

"Your conceit is so colossal, Helen Abercrombie, that it is raised above ordinary weaknesses," declared Miss Carrington, energetically.

"Dear Aunt-elect, you are quite right. I do not think that I am in any way a small woman. If you call it conceit, so be it. But if I did not know that I am handsome I should be a fool, and like the fool say in my heart that 'all men are liars.' I am clever. Experience teaches me that, and my will is not easily downed. You may call it colossal conceit, but I call it an intelligent appraisal of myself. I know that I can do for the man I marry what few women can do, and that I shall do it, and I do think it would be a pity if my husband could not see me." Helen ended her frank speech with a downward glance at her generously displayed beauty. It was her complete disregard of any sort of concealment that shocked the elder woman, who had been trained in the reserved manners of what used to be called "a gentlewoman." Miss Carrington realized that in this she was at variance with her views which admitted freedom, equality, the right of every human being to be and to do what he, and she, as much, saw fit. But the application of the theory, especially in the case of a fair young girl, hurt her.

"Indeed, Helen, I know that you will do for your husband more than other women can," Miss Carrington said, almost humbly. "That is why I want you for Kit, as you understand

quite well. But just why do you want my boy? He is a fine, honest, loyal lad; has a good mind, nice manners; would be no end fond and unselfish, and he is personable—I like that word!—but there are others far richer, others with famous names, better placed in the world. I am glad that you do want Kit, but—why do you? I am sure you are too candid to mind telling me.”

Helen sat erect, drew her drapery around her, and leaned her elbows on her knees to elucidate.

“Aunt Anne,” she said with considerable earnestness, and omitting the restrictive word in the elder woman’s title, “I suppose no one quite understands these things. I don’t altogether. But I have decided that when I say I want Kit that about covers it. It’s precisely what I said awhile ago about Anne Dallas. Attraction attracts, and you can’t define wherein it lies. Kit’s strong, virile beauty—he really is an awfully well-set-up chap—attracts me. Others may have it, in fact they have; the average college boy gets a lot of it if he trains, but in Kit I like it best. I like the way he nods at me when he says something which he thinks is profound and which I’ve always known. I especially like the way his hair grows in the back of his neck, and he has one funny ear lobe, sort of kinky—ever notice it? He doesn’t know what fear is, either physical or moral; doesn’t stop to find it out that it exists. He has a dandy voice in talking, and he says deliciously fool things about girls! He’s strong, clean—I could do a lot with him if he’d love me. And I’m pretty sure he’d get taught how to love me if I married him. I’d put myself out to teach him, and I know how to teach! I think that’s about all there is to it. As I say, it comes to the one thing with which I started: I want Kit Carrington!”

Miss Carrington always sat straight in a straight chair, so she could not be more erect than she had been, yet she had the effect of sitting straighter as she listened to Helen; she became alert.

"Helen, child, all that you say must mean, it *does* mean, that you are in love with Kit! I never dreamed that you were in love with him, but you surely are. I am glad of it. This atavism of mine, as you call it, makes it easier for me to carry out our bargain knowing that you are in love with the boy," she cried.

"Oh, come, now, Miss Carrington," laughed Helen. "I play the game with you, cards face up on the table. You are the sort of woman with whom one can do that; you can't with most of them. I'm not in love with Kit sentimentally; there isn't a drop of the Elizabeth Barrett Browning slush in it! What's that thing she wrote? 'Unless you can muse in a crowd on the face that fixed you?' Heavens! When I'm in the midst of a crowd I'm busy seeing to it that it knows I'm there! And no face ever fixed me—sounds like a spitted chicken! Stuff! If I get Kit—and I mean to—I'll be as pleased as Punch, and so shall he, I promise you. But if I don't get him I'll take someone else and make a good thing of it. What I won't do is to fail in life. I want Kit, do you see? He suits me; I want him. I like all the things about him that I enumerated, and then some. Simply and truthfully, I want Kit. We'd make a corking pair. He's good material. As far as this is worth, I am in love with Kit. But you and I are wide-awake women, with the right labels on ourselves and our world, only I'm beginning to think I'm the elder, you nice old Anne Carrington! Help me to capture your boy and we'll never repent it, you nor I, nor that silly Christopher, who thinks, or will think if we don't straighten his thoughts for him, that he wants that demure mouse! She would make him gruel, possibly, but she would surely make any clever man who had to put up with her monotony sick to the point of needing gruel! She's just the average woman since Eve, Aunt Anne!"

"There's no such thing as an average woman, Helen Abercrombie!" laughed Miss Carrington. "Untold millions of them

since Eve, and every one of them a special creation—ending with you, who are, I confess, the least average of any I have known.”

Helen laughed with her and said:

“Helen fired Troy; it’s queer if she can’t set Kit afire. See here, Miss Carrington, why aren’t we riding, Kit and I? Don’t you know that on a horse I inevitably ride to victory?”

“I’ll have them here in the morning, Helen,” said Miss Carrington. “Make Kit start early enough to ride to the Daphne Woods. It’s the most exquisite, the most emotional road I’ve ever seen, here or abroad.”

“Its name is all of that; I remember it from other visits. I always thought there must have been a poet here before Mr. Latham’s time to name those woods. All right; Daphne Woods it shall be for Kit and me to-morrow morning. And thanks, Miss Carrington, for this satisfactory confession I’ve made. Do I understand that I am shriven?” Helen asked, rising.

“Of what you intend to do? Even an old pagan like me knows that you can’t be shriven of an intention to act, unless you give up the intention. And I hope you will not abandon your plan to steal Kit!”

“Not I!” declared Helen, her soft silks gathered into a spring-like mass of blue and white and blush pinks, turning to wave her hands, thus filled, from the doorway. “I’ll be an improved robber, not with a kit to steal, but a stolen Kit!”

Early the next morning the horses were at the door, Kit’s own horse, a fine-skinned, chestnut sorrel, and one that Miss Carrington had secured for Helen’s riding, a spirited black horse, high-headed, high-stepping, whose magnificent strength made a perfect pedestal for the girl’s blonde grace.

Helen came down the stairs in her golden-brown riding clothes, russet boots, trousers and full-skirted coat of russet-coloured cloth, wearing a silk beaver hat of the same colour, and russet

gauntlets, her ivory-handled stock under one arm. Her hair glinted below her hat, brought down low and held by a net in golden masses above her high white collar and white cravat. Not everyone could have triumphed over this uniformity of tint, but it turned Helen into an autumnal sun-goddess, and Kit, buttoning his gloves as he waited for her, uttered a note of satisfaction on beholding her.

"You're a sight, Helen!" he said, opening the door for her to pass.

"There are sights and sights, Kits! It doesn't as a rule convey anything complimentary to call a person a sight, you know!" Helen said, gaily. She had decided that her rôle for that ride was to be youthful light-heartedness, that of the girl revelling in sunshine, air, and contentment.

Kit gave Helen a hand to mount, which she did not require, swung into his own saddle, and they were off with a wave of their stocks to Miss Carrington, who was smiling on them from the piazza.

"They are a glorious pair; Helen is right, and it does seem as though Kit must perceive the value of such a mate," she thought.

After they had passed out of the city streets they trotted and galloped by turns eastward. The apple trees were in full blossom, and the orioles, those bits of flame amid the sweet delicacy of the springtime bloom, were singing their ecstatic warbling note.

"The May Day of the world and the heyday of youth, Kit! Aren't we lucky to be so young, prosperous, well-mounted, healthy, and handsome among this ravishing beauty?" cried Helen. "I go into the world so much—the world in the other sense—that I often feel almost old; I see and learn so much that is not a part of youth. But when I come here and am out with you, a healthy, wholesome boy, though you are a year older than I am, it all falls away from me, and I feel like a nice little girl rolling her hoop!"

"Poor old Nell," said Kit. "You are mixed up with a whole lot that you'd be better without. I'm glad that you get sips of the Fountain of Youth here. I seem to hate worldliness, do you know it? Now I know people here, Antony Paul and his fine little wife and that wife's family; oh, you saw the child, little Anne, yesterday! They're the most unworldly people——"

"Oh, well, you know, Kit, one mustn't go to extremes," interrupted Helen. "It's a good thing to get the finish and knowledge given by contact with the world. I don't like unworldliness. That's only another name for stupidity. It's no better than a badly furnished room, or poor music, or fake art, or any other ignorance. My idea is to conquer the world, to get the best it has to give you and rise superior to it; to be—what's that trite way of putting it?—in it but not of it? Well, that's the thing. I'd not give up the sense of power, moulding things and people, being one of the worth-while things in the world, for—well, for the world!"

She paused to laugh at herself, but went on: "Don't you think, Kit, that what my father can do, and what he can put me into the way of doing, is great? And what's the matter with using one's advantages to improve things? Isn't that quite possible, and isn't that a worthy ambition? Frumpy folk can't do anything for the keen old world; it knows a good thing when it sees it. You may be sure, Christopher, my son, that half the unworldliness is self-delusion. It is lazy-mindedness, or else an instinct that warns of unfitness for the world; that the person can't play a part in it. He thinks he's superior and renouncing; in reality, he's inferior and thrown out."

"Honest, Helen, that's true!" cried Kit; he looked at Helen with cordial admiration." "I often wonder if I'm not too commonplace to amount to a whole lot, and so I think that I don't want to make a splash. I never saw this side of you; that you cared to help and all that. You are a wonder, Nell; I take off

my hat to you. There isn't much that you couldn't do or be. I'm one of your 'frumpy folk' and couldn't keep step with you."

Helen drew up her horse beside his; she leaned toward him with her bright hair close to his face, her beauty within his reach.

"Ah, Kit," she said, softly, "you are not frumpy! You are a dear, humble-minded fellow; all truly great men are humble; they are simpler than women. There is nothing that you might not do, if you would see yourself as your friends see you. Let me inspire you to self-confidence! Let me feel that when you are a man honoured by others for your benefits to the world, your achievements—for I am sure, Kit, that you could be a power for good with your clear vision and your simple incorruptibility—let me feel that I kindled in you the desire that bore such fruit. Even though after all is said I am but a pretty girl, yet I am one that can love what is worth loving though you think me only a shallow, vain creature!"

Helen's face bent forward; she dropped her lids over her eyes as if to hide their flame, or their tears; her voice thrilled, her beautifully trained, silvery voice.

Kit's hand went out as if to draw her to him; the space between them was slight. He flushed and quivered to her beauty as to her emotion. Then there arose before him a small figure, simply clad; a low, broad brow and beneath it steady eyes of brown, like a fire on a home hearth, and sweet, firm lips moved to let a soft alto voice say in memory to him again:

"It would be a pity for you to fail with your life, because you can use it well if you follow your instincts. And what is counted gain is often tragic failure."

Kit straightened himself in his saddle.

"You are mighty kind, Helen," he said. "I don't mistake myself; you see I have my own measure fairly accurately. Miss Dallas was saying the other day what came to almost the same

thing that you've just said, only she didn't get it from the same angle. I'll try to play up when the time comes." Helen's horse leaped at the sudden pull which she gave the curb and the blow that she dealt him. The horse dashed away and Kit rapidly followed.

"Say, Helen, don't give Jack-of-Spades surprise parties; he's one of the sensible sort that doesn't care for them, and he's capable of giving a return surprise party," Kit warned her, regaining his place at her bridle.

"I can conquer any fool brute I ever attempted!" said Helen, her colour high, her eyes flashing. Then she conquered herself.

"Did I scare you, good old Kit? You were the one I meant to surprise. Isn't your aunt a dear to get me a horse like this? Isn't she an old darling, anyway? She's truly fond of me, I'm gratefully sure of that. It's a big thing to win the love of a lonely old woman. She loves me next to you, Kit, and I'm not unappreciative. How these horses keep pace! What a pleasant thing it is to ride at the same gait, in unison of hoofbeats! That's a sermon in brief, though unintentional, and it's for you to draw the moral. So this is Daphne Woods! It's the loveliest spot I ever saw. I'm glad that you are showing me this shadowy, green, mystic loveliness for the first time. We have many memories in common, my dear old pal. Daphne Woods is a dream. Don't let me waken, Kit!"

## CHAPTER IX

### *Soundings*

**H**ELEN and Kit rode on through the verdant shade of Daphne Woods with few words spoken between them. At times the brown accumulations of the leaves of past springs deadened the sound of the horses' feet, but oftener their rhythm was distinctly beaten out on the perfectly kept road.

"Riding at the same gait, in unison of hoofbeats." Kit found himself dwelling on the words as if they were an oracle's prophecy and its fulfilment.

Was it possible that Helen meant what she surely conveyed? Was it possible that a nice girl would intentionally convey it?

Helen rode on pensively sweet and preoccupied. She rode somewhat in advance of Kit; the honest boy thought that it was to hide her face. He was right, but by inversion; Helen wanted Kit to see her back, which she had been told was provocatively graceful on horseback. He felt, as he had repeatedly felt in this visit of hers, that he did not know her. The Helen of her exhortation to him he knew, keen-witted, worldly, strong-willed, but this girl? Gentle, wistful, affectionate, dependent, almost child-like in appeal for sympathy? This was another Helen; this one might be as lovable as the other was dazzling. Suddenly she turned to Kit, resting her hand on her saddle, swinging halfway around in it to face him.

"Kit, you don't understand women," she said with a quaver in her voice. "Perhaps I mean girls, *a* girl, *this* girl! Can't you see how one may be defeated in victory? How little it means

to be pretty, clever, rich, admired, when one is all alone? Father is a dear to me, but he can't play the game of politics for such high stakes as those he is out for and have much time to spare for his girl. Well! I pretend a lot, but I don't mind my old pal's knowing that I'm just plain girl, and no goddess, not even an ambitious woman at heart. Daphne Woods stirs in me everything that I fight down. It doesn't do to let it poke up its head to be fed when I can't feed it! It's too lovely in here, too ideal to be good for me. Oh, Kit, take me home!"

Kit's heart beat faster. Helen was intoxicating with her eyes downcast, her voice low and vibrant. Her simple, direct appeal moved him by the pathos of its revelation of sweetness where he had known only hardness; of weakness where he had thought there was only self-reliant strength.

"Why, Nell, dear," he cried, "I didn't know you felt like this! Spring in the woods always sets me off, too. Funny how all human beings are casting about for something, they're not sure just what. Nature gets us going, doesn't it? October is as bad as May, in another way. Yet it is a sweet sorrow, don't you think? Something like parting! Sure, I'll take you home. You're probably tired, too. Lunch will be ready by the time we get there."

Helen swung back again in her saddle and turned Jack-of-Spades sharply. Then she looked hard at Kit and laughed, her softened mood flung from her.

"It's hard telling, Christopher Carrington, whether you're a bit clever, or more than a bit stupid," she said, and rode ahead of him, Jack-of-Spades on a gallop, toward the end of the woods.

Kit went up to his room to get out of his riding clothes into his daily attire. He was slow about it; considering hard, puzzled, interested, confused in thought, clearer in impressions than he liked to admit.

"Well," he ended his meditations, arousing himself with

difficulty to be aware of the knot of his tie, "it makes you feel like a yellow dog to think it, but what am I to think? Looks as if Aunt Anne knew; probably women always know. But why in thunder——? Nell is strictly and within bounds of statement a winner. There are such a lot of fellows—I never have altogether liked Nell; that is, I never fell for her. Worldly women strike me about the way an angel stock broker would hit you. But apparently I haven't got her right. I suppose it's hard for mere man to know 'em, fathom 'em. A kaleidoscope is stable compared to 'em! Nell isn't so worldly after all. She's capable of unambitious attachments, it seems. I suppose nice ones are cut on the same pattern in their general lines. They all want affection, children, the things best worth while."

Kit went downstairs feeling benignant. He was human, and though not as conceited as most of his age and sex, there was no denying that he found it pleasant to suspect that a clever, beautiful young creature turned toward him, innocently betraying that she could love him. It gave Kit a calm, uplifted, vague sense of pitiful but delightful things enveloping him. It perturbed him, of course; what he should do about it must be faced, but in the meantime there was no getting away from the fact that he liked it. He was fine enough to attribute to Helen the maternal instinct that led her from the plaudits of society toward shadowy little hands, impatiently pat-a-caking for her to clasp them and draw them forth into the world.

As Kit came down the stairs Helen's pretty laughter rang out to him. It was her old mocking laughter, but this time it did not, as usual, jar on him. He knew that often she did not laugh; she had shown him this. He did not suspect that she had been describing their ride to his aunt, who found Helen as entertaining as a Shaw play, and touching lightly and cleverly upon his failure to take the good things that the gods, or rather the goddess, provided.

He paused at the hall table to take up and look over a pamphlet which lay there, paying no attention to remarks which Miss Carrington was making in train of Helen's laugh.

But clear as a bell and perfectly heard, not only by Kit's ears, but by his brain, came Helen's reply. Her voice was as modulated as always, but it rang to an uncommon degree with the fervour of strong conviction and determination, and with no small amount of contempt.

"No, indeed, dear Miss Carrington," she said. "Not I! I cordially dislike children. It used to be an admission of the lowest criminality to say this, but any number of my generation feel as I do. Why should I want children? Horrid, crude little animals at first, and later on men and women who go off and leave one to get on as one can. Better cultivate adults, select amusing friends, than to set up children and waste one's best years on a most improbable chance of getting something out of it. I am free, strong, graceful, good-looking. Do you think for one moment I'd lay all that down and be ugly, in order to have a thing that I'd abominate to look at and positively would not handle? Poms or pekes are more sensible, but I've no yearning for pets. As to someone to come after me, inherit, all that idiocy, what do I care what happens when I am dead? Ugh, horrible to be dead! Children would perpetually remind you that they were posterity, and posterity is a *memento mori*. No children for me, ever! Selah! I didn't intend to wax eloquent, Aunt Anne, but it always riles me to have anyone attribute to me the maternal longing—like a cat, who really is a model mother; I know none more devoted."

Poor Kit! Grateful to his rubber heels, he turned and walked away. He felt like an aviator whose engine had gone wrong above the clouds diving down to the ground with dizzy speed.

Which was Helen? What was Helen? Could she be playing a part to Miss Carrington? No; her voice was strained with

sincerity, and why should she play a part? Kit knew that his aunt's devotion to the new philosophies would not prevent the shock with which she would hear a young, beautiful woman, endowed in every way to fulfil her rôle in life, repudiate and denounce motherhood.

Then had Helen played a part with him? Much more likely.

He ate his luncheon almost in silence. At intervals he stole a glance at Helen, saw her serene, exquisite; the charm of femininity and grace in every motion of her slender hands, her willowy body. But the meaning of her femininity was gone; only the shell of her beauty was left, if those long, curling fingers would refuse to caress a baby's cheek.

As soon as lunch was over Kit went toward the door.

"Going off, Kits?" asked Helen. "Not going to stay and be pretty-behaved to me?"

"I'm going to the Berkleys'," said Kit. "Sorry, but I'm going to the Berkleys'."

It was like him to make the statement baldly, not to invent an errand to the Berkleys'. It had come to him as he spoke that this was where he was going. The simple happiness of that household, its effortless mutual enjoyment; the love for one another that permeated the atmosphere of the house, rose up before him, and made Kit feel that it was as necessary to get his perturbed mind cleared and cheered by the Berkley family as it could be to find a spring if he were parched with desert thirst.

"Going to play with little Anne?" inquired Helen.

"If she'll let me! Nice kid!" said Kit, shortly, and was gone.

"Don't mock Kit's idols. He's like most quiet and peaceable people; when he's offended he's hard to placate, and when he's disgusted he's not to be won back. Kit's tremendously fond of his friends. But I share his pleasure in that precocious

innocent, with her delightful combination of normal mischief with abnormal conscientiousness," warned Miss Carrington.

Kit found all the Berkleys at home, as he had hoped to, with the addition of Joan Paul and her baby.

Little Anne saw him coming and ran shrieking joyously to haul him into the house, as if he would be likely to escape her unless she put forth her best strength.

"Here's Kit! See, here's Kit, Motherkins! Kit's come!" she announced needlessly as she towed him into the room.

Mrs. Berkley arose with her white sewing held in her left hand, and gave her right hand cordially to the young man.

"Very glad to see you," she said. "I've tried to make Anne remember that you are Mr. Carrington, but she loves you too well to retain my instructions."

"Sure! Because I'm not! I'm Kit, eh, Anne? Your little purring kit, or at least I purr when I see you!" said Kit.

"You're lovely!" Little Anne sighed enthusiastically over his nonsense.

"Hallo, Mother Joan! Don't break that baby! Aren't you holding her carelessly?" Kit demanded, shaking Joan's hand and looking anxiously at Barbara, held under her young mother's left arm, her head in front sticking up like a turtle's, her heels kicking hard and fast on Joan's waist at the back.

"Can't you trust me with her, Kit? I'm glad that you recognize how precious she is, but, honestly, I like her myself and don't want to damage her," laughed Joan, bringing her daughter right side up into her arms and kissing her fat neck till the baby choked herself with giggles.

"Say, Joan, there's something I want to be told. Set it down to my scientific bent: investigation of socialism, or economics, or anything statistical you please, but I do want to learn something: Does that baby ever tire you?" Kit asked his question hesitantly.

"I should say she does, half to pieces," said Joan, promptly. "I'm sometimes tempted to try ether on her at night! You know those verses of Mrs. Kilmer's about keeping her children asleep? Maybe I don't say them!" Joan kissed Barbara again to punctuate her confession.

"But you don't tire of her the way I mean, do you?" persisted Kit. "You don't ever feel as if she weren't quite worth while, as if you'd rather be free from the bother——"

"Christopher Carrington," Joan sternly interrupted him, "one more word and I'll call the police and commit you as a dangerous ogre, not fit to be at large. What in all this world makes you ask me that? As though any woman worth her salt would feel that way to a little child, even if it weren't her own! And when it is——" Joan could end this sentence only with more violent kisses in the neck and all over the face of the ecstatically squirming Barbara. "Why, I only wish she were twins or triplets! I'd like a houseful of the darlings, all sizes, sorts, and colours! To be the mother of such a creature of God as this baby—Kit, it's the most awful, the most beautiful thing in the world! Why did you ask me that? Whom have you heard talking like a monster, corrupting your naturally good heart?"

"You're a sharp little woman, though you don't betray it always, Joan!" Kit said with amused admiration. "I'm not corrupted; I only wondered how you felt. All girls don't like babies."

Joan gave him a keen look.

"Avoid the kind that doesn't," she advised, tersely.

"First God made angels, then us, and He made everybody but Adam and Eve a baby," said little Anne, anxious as she always was to elevate the conversation to a catechetical standard. "So it would be wicked not to love babies when God made 'em for us to love, and then went and made 'em so darling that you

have to love 'em. Herod didn't, but he was a fearfully wicked king. They were all boys, anyway."

"And Barbara is a girl," commented Kit. "I hope you don't think boys are less fit to live than girls, little Anne?"

"Well," said little Anne, slowly, "Sister Gervase teaches the middle-sized ones at my school, and she says boys pass through a trying—I think she said 'stage,' but there aren't any in Cleavage; there are buses in New York on Fifth Avenue, and I rode on top, but I do think she said 'stage.' Sister says they have to be rather bad, but that there's lots of good mixed up with it, too. Anyway, she says, what would we do if there weren't any boys to grow up men, and that's what I think."

"Do you?" said a gruff voice from the doorway, laden with pessimistic contempt. "What I think is that no boy at your age ever talked one-sixteenth part as much as you do, and if boys were more trying than girls I'd pity 'em. But what's more, I'd pity their families." Peter stalked into the room and threw down an armful of books, nodded to Kit, and said with the air of one who had outlived emotion:

"I got your books changed at the library, Joan, but what you wanted was out, except that history essay stuff Antony wanted. And the girl over there sent something she hoped would suit you, but I don't suppose it will."

"You poor dear Pete!" cried Joan. "You're a trump to do this tiresome errand! If they're not right, never mind; I'll take them back in the baby's carriage when I go out with her tomorrow. I'm sorry I didn't do that in the first place; I've no business to be such a nuisance!"

"You're no nuisance; you never were, Joan," said Peter, graciously. "If I thought Anne would ever grow up to be a little like you it sure would be a pleasant thought!"

"Now never mind about little Anne," interposed Mrs. Berkley, seeing little Anne getting ready for self-defence, at

which she was only too adept. "She's a loving little girl who tries to correct her faults, especially now." Mrs. Berkley held up the thin white material on which she was sewing. "You see, Peter, dear, you are too near Anne's age to remember how it feels to be that age; we understand it better from our greater distance. But you are the best lad in the world, Peter the Second, just as Anne is the dearest little girl."

Mrs. Berkley, having contrived to suggest to Peter his extreme youth, proceeded to rejoice the heart which adored her by beaming on him affectionately that his vanity might not be too deeply wounded.

As Kit looked on and listened to this talk the disturbance of mind with which he had set out faded away. They were not saying wise things that could be quoted; they were not doing great deeds, unless it were both wise and great thus to correct, guide, make happy. Kit felt that it was. He was not an analyst; he instinctively felt much that he could not formulate in words; he possessed a code for his own guidance that he would have found difficult to write out for another. Now he began to see by the steady light of inward vision recent events cast upon the screen in their true proportions, the unconscious goodness of this simple family, the standard by which he measured them.

"I've some money that my mother left me," he said, aloud, as unexpectedly to himself as to his audience.

Mrs. Berkley looked up, trying to mask her surprise.

"Have you, Kit? That's nice, though it is not likely that you'll need more than the Carrington inheritance," she said, in her motherly way.

"I didn't mean to inflict upon you an item of such limited interest," said Kit. "I didn't know I was going to say that; I thought aloud. You know, Mrs. Berkley, that Aunt Anne loves me in a way that may easily unlove me if I ever displease her."

"Well put, Kit," said Mrs. Berkley. "But do you think you

are likely to displease her? I'd be sorry to have you, not only for your own sake, but because Miss Carrington is such a piteous, denuded person. It is ghastly to think of her bleak horizon!"

"I don't suppose many people pity Miss Anne Carrington," said Kit. "But you are right; she is denuded, with a bleak outlook. I don't know whether or not I'll ever displease her, nor how hard it would hit her if I did; I mean how much she'd resent what I wouldn't do. But a fellow can't go too far, from a sense of duty."

"Don't you mean that a fellow can't go too far, from a *mistaken* sense of duty, but must go all the way for the sake of actual duty?" suggested Mrs. Berkley. "You are mysterious, Kit, but we'll always be glad if you come to us when you want to thresh out your bothers."

"I know!" cried little Anne with one of her flashes of unchild-like perception. "Miss Carrington likes the splendid princess lady, who is one of the proud step-sisters, better'n you do, Kit!"

Kit gasped. "Anne!" he cried. "What under the sun——?"

"Anne doesn't realize as much as her remarks convey to others," interpolated the child's mother. "Children of her sort are sensitive to atmosphere, but they can't gauge all that it envelops. You haven't asked what I am making, Kit, and that is a safe subject!"

"I ask now," said Kit.

"A dress for me!" cried little Anne, forestalling her mother. "It is for my First Communion. Mother is making it only straight and full because she likes it simple, she says. These queer places with the threads all pulled out aren't wrong, Kit; they're for hemstitching and it's lovely. Mother's making it every bit by hand, by her hand. I'll pray for you that day, Kit; then you'll be all right. Is anything not all right now, dear Kit?"

"Everything is perfectly right, little Anne," Kit answered,

"but I wouldn't mind being prayed for by you, if you wouldn't mind doing it. Queer little Anne!"

He kissed her thin cheek, clasping the small eager face raised to him, its great eyes searching his face as if they would read his soul.

"Everyone! Everyone in all this world that I love!" little Anne solemnly assured him. "It will be on Corpus Christi, at the nine-o'clock Mass, in the real church; not the basement. Kit, I shall walk up the aisle all in white and have on a veil, and, and, Kit, I do hope, *hope* I shall not die before that! And Father is going to give the flowers, and so is Antony. And we shall all be there, in the church, all my own I love. Even Peter-two!"

"And I? Might I come?" asked Kit, hesitating whether he should ask the privilege.

"Oh, goody, goody!" cried little Anne, instantly changed back into a joyous little girl, and whirling madly about, clapping her hands. "Kit can come, Kit can come! All K's—no; all C's—no; well, it sounds all something alike, anyway! What a day it will be! Mother, Kit will come to the church for me!"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Berkley. "Thank you, Kit, for loving my little Anne. Must you go? Come again soon, dear Kit Carrington!"

Then all went out on the steps to see him off: Joan, with her baby on her hip; Peter, dignified, but affectionate to Kit, whom he admired; Mrs. Berkley, motherly and kind; little Anne clinging fondly to his hand.

As he walked down the street he felt that he had learned the wisdom that he had gone to seek.

## CHAPTER X

### *The Stray Page*

**R**ICHARD LATHAM, his dictation over for the day, had gone with Stetson to the bank. He had been unusually silent, Anne Dallas had thought, absent-minded, and he looked pale, as if he had not rested well.

She had not asked him questions; more than most men he disliked to discuss his health, but it seemed to Anne, considering after he had gone, that Richard Latham was not himself.

She sat in the poet's beautiful garden at work on some lace, the pillow on her knee. The fragrance of apple blossoms was on the warm breeze that brushed her face.

"Sumer is icumen in," thought Anne, skilfully catching her thread into a knot on her needle point. She felt more than usual pity for Richard, recalling his patient face, to know that he, of all men best fitted to dwell with enchanted eyes on summer's loveliness, never again would see it.

"Miss Dallas! Miss Dallas! Miss Anne! Miss Anne Dallas! Anne! Anne!" shouted someone in such rapid-fire calling that reply was impossible. It could be but one person, and Anne Dallas looked up expectantly to see little Anne coming flying down the garden. Her long, thin legs, in their long, brown stockings, her brown, straight frock, her bobbed hair standing out around her head, all combined to give her the effect of a forked branch of a tree which had been snapped off and blown along the path by a higher wind than that which was actually blowing. Behind her ran the beagle, Cricket, his black-and-tan

ears streaming backward, his tongue out, his eyes excitedly rolling, his breath visibly short. He did not venture with Anne into most of her explorations, but he had learned that the Latham garden was safe for timid bow-legged dogs, and hither he confidently came.

"What is it, Anne, dear?" asked Anne Dallas, guarding her work against little Anne's imminent onslaught. "Glad to see you."

"Guess what!" cried little Anne, throwing herself upon Anne. As she spoke she waved papers held together by a fastener.

"I never could guess!" declared Anne with conviction. "Are you appointed Queen of the Birds, or are you sentenced to exile in an ant hill, you little quicksilver creature?"

"Oh, you are nice!" panted little Anne, appreciatively. "This isn't a—a—an appointing dockermment. What do you s'pose?"

Anne shook her head, and little Anne cried triumphantly:

"It's these is; Peter's!"

"These *is*? These *are*, Anne. And what are Peter's? That isn't English."

Anne looked puzzled.

"That's just what it is; his English class; he said so," little Anne insisted. "Peter-two said he'd bet I couldn't make him mad, a child like me! That's when I got kind of mad with Peter-two, and I said so'd he be, and he said I couldn't make him mad, 'cause I wasn't 'nough importance. And he had his these is—these are—but, Miss Anne, I know, at least I pretty near know, Peter said these is—and he had to have it in school this morning, and I got it, and hid it, and here 'tis, and he's gone without it, and I guess he will be good'n mad, won't he?"

In spite of herself Anne laughed, then she arose to her duty.

"Anne, that is poor Peter's thesis!" she cried. "Let me see it. Of course it is that! And you have sent Peter to school without it! Don't you know, dear, that Peter will be reprimanded?"

manded for his carelessness, and receive bad marks besides? You should not play tricks on Peter that will get him into trouble at school."

Instantly little Anne dropped from her height of triumphant glee into depths of contrite shame.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! Oh, Miss Anne, is it bad? And I'm preparing and trying to be good! I mustn't do one least, littlest sin. Is it a sin, Miss Anne? Do you think it could be a mortal sin, or just venial? But I've no business to commit even the weeniest venial sin when I'm preparing! Not the weest, littlest one! Is it a mortal sin, Miss Anne?"

"Goodness, what a child!" sighed Anne. "Dear little Anne, I suppose I don't know as much as I should about it, but if mortal means what it usually does, this isn't a mortal sin. It seems to me a fault, not a sin, you small Mediæval Survival! It isn't kind to vex Peter, and you ought not to get him into a scrape."

"What'll I do?" Little Anne looked profoundly downcast for a moment; then she cheered up. "It's too late now to do anything," she said in a relieved tone. "Peter's school gets out at two and it's 'most noon. I'll tell him I'm sorry, and I'll give him—give him—my new blank book. He'll love it and it'll be good for him to write these ises in, to remind him his little sister's sorry—and how she *could* make him mad, even if she is little!"

Anne grew more and more consoled as she looked longer at the brighter side of her fall.

"And I'll ask my mother what kind of a sin it was; she knows all about every kind of sin. Should I say the Act of Contrition?"

Little Anne looked ready to fall on her knees and do penance with hearty enjoyment, and Anne said, hastily:

"Better ask your mother about that, too, dear. What a queer child you are!"

Then Anne's changeable little face lost its elfin look of mingled

regret and satisfaction, her eyes dilated and were raised, her lips quivered, a flush slowly spread to her hair; she clasped her thin, quick hands and said:

"Just to be good! Just to be so good that there never would be one stain on me and I'd never be mad, nor make Peter-two mad, but be a white, loving soul in the world!"

Anne looked at her, startled. She was accustomed to little Anne's flights, her strange, unchildlike aspirations and depths of understanding, and her mercurial falls into human mischief. But there was on her small face now such a rapt look that Anne was conscious of awe that was partly fear. She laid her hand softly on the child's hair and little Anne came down to earth without the loss of a moment.

"I found something," she said. "Can Mr. Latham write?"

"Write? Do you mean—— Oh, you mean write as we do, with his own hand?" asked Anne, trying to adjust to this new topic. "Yes. He was not always blind; he lost his sight in an accident. He writes a tiny, tiny hand, hard to read, though every letter is clearly formed. He uses paper with raised lines, else his lines would run together. He does not often try to write; he writes to a few friends, to Mr. Wilberforce most. Why did you ask that, dear?"

"I found something," repeated little Anne, "when I was looking for you. It was on the floor, upstairs in the hall. I went upstairs and I called you, but of course you didn't hear out in the garden. I picked it up."

Little Anne produced from the pocket in her skirt, of which she was inordinately proud, a sheet of paper, folded small. She spread it out on her knee and carefully smoothed it; Anne saw that it was an ordinary sheet of letter paper, unruled, covered with Richard Latham's microscopic characters, running together in places, straggling apart in others, lines of irregular length, verses.

Anne hesitated a moment; she probably had already copied these verses, dictated to her by Richard. They could not be anything that he did not wish her to see. If it had been something in prose form she would not have looked at it, fearing it might be a letter not intended for her eyes, but verses written by him belonged to her official care.

"May I see, little Anne?" she asked, and took the paper.

She knew at once that these were not verses that she had ever copied. She read them with difficulty in deciphering them, with greater difficulty in controlling the terror, actual terror, which they inspired in her.

FOR ANNE

*"There is a song I must not sing  
Which sings itself the livelong day;  
There is a plea I must not bring  
Which ev'ry breath I draw must pray;  
There is a word past uttering  
The only word my tongue would say:  
Oh, sweetest, fairest, dearest, best, in silence I must go my way!  
  
Oh, blinded eyes deprived of light;  
Oh, hunger that is never fed;  
Oh, love that yearns, denied the right  
To kiss a tress upon that head;  
Oh, broken life, creep far from sight  
To hide where pity makes thy bed  
For glory, fame, and wealth are stones to me, a beggar craving bread."*

"I love poetry," hinted little Anne, but checked herself when she saw the elder Anne's face.

It had turned quite white, tears stood in her dark eyes, her lips quivered.

"Oh, little Anne, what can it mean? Who is it? Why didn't I have it to copy?" Anne murmured. "Oh, he mustn't know we read it!"

"I didn't," said little Anne, reproachfully, and Anne kissed her, grateful that the child made her smile.

"Promise me on your honour, little Anne, that you will never speak to any one of having found these verses. Promise! And remember that a promise is a sacred thing, faithfully to be kept," she said.

"I never in this world break my promises," declared little Anne, proudly, but truthfully. "I promise! Not even Mother?"

"You may tell her that you found the verses, but that no one is to know it; you can say that you did not know what they were like," Anne said, wisely deciding that this concession would be a safety valve to little Anne's unimpeachable honour.

"Do you know where you found the paper, Anne? Then take it into the house, please, and lay it where it was, and come back to me. Hurry, little Anne! Oh, if Mr. Latham should come in before you did this!"

"He can't find it on the floor, can he?" little Anne demurred.

"Then Stetson will. Don't delay, dear; please be quick!" Anne fairly turned the child around by the shoulders and pushed her toward the house. Little Anne was speedy; she was back before Anne had time to worry over the likelihood of Richard's coming, or Cricket to fall into utter despair at being abandoned by his small mistress.

"I think I'd better go home now," announced little Anne on her return. "I heard the Angelus down at our church quite a long time ago, so it's 'most my lunch time. You look kind of pale, Miss Anne, dear. Was that bad for me to pick up that paper? I thought it was only neat when it was lying around like that. Was that a sin? Like troubling Peter-two? It's very, very awful hard to walk sinlessly in this world, isn't it?"

"Oh, Anne, darling, of course it was only neat!" cried the girl, kissing little Anne heartily.

"Well, you can't do sins unless you know they are wrong and just go ahead and mean to, but I kind of forget that; only when I recite it, you know," said the thin theologian. "I've got to tell Peter 'was me took his these is, and nobody can tell what he'll say to me! Mother won't let him *do* anything, but she'll talk to me, and that's worse. It's the most fearfulest of all when mother's sorry! But I've got to be willing to bear it, if I didn't do right, and I can offer it up. Good-bye, darling Miss Anne. I hope I didn't make you sick with that paper; you look sicky."

"Not a bit, funny little Anne. Good-bye, and come soon again," she said, cheerfully.

Little Anne looked worried, she went slowly toward her acknowledgment of wrong-doing and her penance, but she forgot all about it as new thoughts took possession of her. She flew at her customary speed down the street, Cricket breathlessly running after her.

To Anne's inexpressible relief Richard Latham telephoned to her to say that he would lunch out, and that there would be nothing to keep her within doors that lovely afternoon.

She gladly availed herself of this chance to get away from the familiar beauty of the garden and adjust her perturbed mind to her dismaying discovery. She went down through the garden and let herself out by the small gate at its rear that opened on a path which led to a pretty bit of woods of which she was fond. It must be set down in honesty that before she went out Anne went upstairs, picked up the paper which little Anne had faithfully laid exactly where she had found it, and made a copy for herself of the two stanzas which had so stirred her. Then she, like the smaller Anne, put the paper on the floor and went away.

She walked swiftly to the spot in the woods which she had in

mind in setting forth and dropped on the mossy sod to think. She was not a vain girl, not prone to believe herself admired, not consciously seeking admiration. She was singularly direct in mind and simple in motives. She accepted herself, the fact that she was pretty, that she had several accomplishments and was generally liked, as a pleasant thing, but not to be emphasized more than any other pleasant fact like sunshine, or good green grass.

In her silent way Anne held strongly to strong purposes in life; young as she was she "had found herself," as it is expressively put nowadays. And the person who is thus balanced, who actually has "found herself," is not likely to waste time looking for other things or people.

In her close intimacy with Richard Latham for almost a year, she had been flooded with a pity for him that was always at high tide within her. She admired him for his beauty of character as much as for his gifts of mind. His gentle courtesy, his sweetness, the modesty that persevered in spite of the plaudits that he received, had inspired in her a passion of affectionate pity for him that rather excluded than led to love for him. Of herself in connection with him—beyond her ability to be useful to him, to serve him in his work, to brighten his days—she had never thought. That his reliance on her, his appreciation of her personally, as well as of what she did, might mean love for her, had never till that day crossed her mind. He was to her a man removed from this possibility no less by his misfortune than by his genius.

Anne laid her head down on the moss and cried miserably. It was unbearable to think that she had brought pain into this afflicted life. True, it would be easy to assuage it. Yet not so easy. She did not love Richard. She held him as one of the dearest of her earthly ties, but she did not love him. She felt sure that if she were to try to make him happy, if she devoted

her life to him, that he was far too sensitive not to feel the lack of the right sort of love in his wife; far too high-minded to be less than wretched at being the object of her immolation. A strong word, an absurd one to use in connection with marriage to Richard Latham, Anne knew that most people would say, yet to a girl like her any marriage without the love that marriage implies and demands would be immolation. She cried with all her might into the soft moss.

Presently Anne heard a footstep and raised her head to see Miss Carrington near her, standing looking down on her with sincere amazement, but also with carefully arranged sympathy in her face.

"I suppose there is no use in denying it, but don't mind me, Miss Carrington. It's only a bother that will probably prove more bearable than it looks in perspective; most things are less unendurable than you expect them to be when they come to close range," Anne said, checking her tears.

"My dear child," said Miss Carrington, coming over to put her arm gently around Anne with an intense desire to get at the cause of her emotion, "you are young, and I am at least elderly. You are alone in Cleavedge. Won't you trust me, my dear, and tell me what is wrong? I can hold my tongue, I assure you, and I know what it is to be alone."

"It isn't myself only, Miss Carrington," said Anne.

"How could it be? Did you ever hear of a human experience that was? My dear, it's my opinion that we not only cannot be separated to ourselves in this world, but as a rule we should not have troubles if it weren't for other people! Won't you let me try to help?" Miss Carrington persisted.

Anne shook her head. "Thank you, nevertheless," she said. "This is not the sort of thing that any one else can help, nor I, either, I'm afraid."

"Let me guess!" Miss Carrington took Anne's hands, cold

from hard weeping, between her silky palms, the soft, cool, frail hands of an old gentlewoman. "Let me guess! At your age there can be but one cause of such violent weeping, so I can easily conjecture. You have just discovered what I have known all along, that Richard Latham loves you." She hoped that this was a good guess and not that this weeping concerned Kit; she held Anne's hands fast in spite of her attempts to pull them away, disregarding her protesting: "No, no, no!"

"Known all along?" Anne repeated her last words, startled out of her caution.

"Surely, my dear. My nephew and I have discussed it; we hope that it is true," Miss Carrington assured her, stretching the small "we" to fit her need. "It frightens you? You are such a dear, maidenly, old-time girl that I suppose we must allow for your first shrinking when you learn that you are loved. Then, of course, it awes you to think that it is a poet, Richard Latham, who loves you, a poet and a blind poet! But, oh, my dear, my dear, how inappropriate are your tears! How blessed, how exalted you are! By his genius, certainly, but by his need of you more. A woman is blessed exactly in proportion to the need of her in those she loves. Mr. Latham not only loves you, as we all saw, devotedly, devoutly—that is the better word!—but he loves you with such complete dependence upon you that it is no exaggeration to say that, though he might not die if he lost you, he would in no real sense go on living if he were deprived of you. To be the life of such a man! To be his inspiration and his repose! Indeed I congratulate you, I would envy you were I not done with life. And I am sure from what I know of you that perfect happiness could not come to you except in the opportunity to devote yourself. You are not ambitious, like, for instance, the handsome girl who will be Kit's wife. Of course her ambition will help Kit, who is going in for a career. It is a most satisfactory arrangement to me, but it would not do

for you! I don't mind admitting to you that Helen's ideals are less fine than yours, but I am glad to have her marry Kit. Don't think I'm underestimating Helen. And of course what has slipped out to you is in confidence; it is not to be made public yet. Dear child, dear little namesake, with all my heart I rejoice that Richard Latham has his compensation in you. We have all feared to conjecture what might happen to him if it were the wrong woman. I can't say more of you than that you are supremely the right woman. I am deeply thankful. Never another tear, my child! You would have slain our poet if you had failed him; you don't know how glad I am!"

Anne, exhausted from weeping, stunned and frightened by what she was hearing, made some feeble attempts to check this torrent of delight. She heard, with terror and a sense of being engulfed, that Richard Latham's life was in her hands. It came upon her with overpowering force that if this were so clear to these sharp old eyes, there was no alternative before her but to marry him and do her best. She also heard with a numb ache that bewildered her that Kit was to marry Helen Abercrombie, who was so far removed from his simple kindliness, his goodness, his warmth of heart. This secret was for Anne to keep!

How strange a day of endings and beginnings!

Patiently Anne submitted to being kissed by Miss Carrington. She fancied there was an infusion of a salute to the bride in the embrace. Slowly she went back to her boarding place, weary in brain and body.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Penitential*

**I**F A Roman general ever went out certain of conquest and returned defrauded of his triumph to be chained to the wheels of a chariot and dragged through the city in disgrace, instead of gloriously striding that chariot, then that general and Peter Berkley the Second would have understood each other's bitterness."

Little Anne's heart sank lower when she heard the outer door slam, though by the time that she had reached home and had waited, dreading to hear Peter's step, it was already sufficiently despairing. To make matters worse, Mrs. Berkley had gone to lunch with Joan, leaving Bibiana, Anne's former nurse, now serving as waitress, to see that the children were comfortable. Children, indeed! Peter was a ruined man. He came into the house with a tragic stride, gloom upon his brow, but in spite of his mature sense of catastrophe—he demanded his mother instantly as Anne might have done, while he threw his books and hat in different directions and himself into a chair, like Napoleon after Waterloo.

Little Anne rose from a dark corner looking white and small. She was trembling, but she did what was required of her, albeit her voice was faint and it quavered.

"Mother went to Joan's, Peter. I'm sorry, Peter-two," she said.

"So am I. I'd like to talk to her," growled Peter. "But of course she'd go when I need her so bad."

"No, Peter; she's 'most always here for our lunch, but Babs has a cold," little Anne was still able to justify her mother. "And you don't have to talk to her, Peter; I shall tell her myself, and I am sorry, truly."

"Heh?" cried Peter, arousing to the fact that Anne was not sorry only that her mother was absent. "What are you sorry about? What'll you tell her? See here, did you——"

Little Anne nodded hard, choking. Peter looked dreadfully fierce and grown-up, and she became sharply aware that she was only seven.

"You! stole——?" Peter's emotions 'again choked his speech.

"Your these is—are," said little Anne, miserably.

"What for?" Peter fairly roared at the trembling child. "What good did it do you, you—you—bad, meddlesome monkey?"

"It was because you said I couldn't make you mad," said little Anne, rallying slightly. Peter calling her names was more familiar, less formidable than Peter inarticulate. "I never thought it would make you trouble till Miss Anne said so. I am dreadful sorry, honest I am, Peter-two! I'll give you my new blank book with the red cover to make rusti—resti—to make up. And your these is—are—is not hurt."

"Good heavens!" burst out Peter. "You might think it was bric-à-brac! You'd suppose even a kid would know it had to be turned in at school to-day, and isn't a thing to be harmed. I'm harmed, I'll tell you *that*, Miss Anne! I'm disgraced, that's what! Heaps of the fellows have been getting out of doing these, so the heads made a rule that the next one that didn't have his paper ready would be made an example. *I was it!* It's a thing a fellow can't live down; I was disgraced. And I hadn't even a slim excuse to offer. I'd no mortal idea where it was, went to get it out—gone! When I said I'd written it, made a

donkey of myself generally, looking like a gibbering idiot, it settled me; course they thought I was lying!"

"Tell them it was me, tell them, Peter!" begged little Anne. "I don't want them to know, but it's truth, so I must. Tell them, Peter-two, I took it and it wasn't your fault."

"Yes, I guess!" Peter derided her. "I'd look well saying my kid sister was allowed to rummage my things and steal my papers, now wouldn't I? I'd look well hiding behind you, my kid sister, wouldn't I!"

"Kind of like Adam," said little Anne, absent-mindedly. "Then what can you do, Peter-two?"

"Bear it," said Peter through his closed teeth.

It had such a fearful ring that little Anne began to cry softly.

"Oh, Peter-two, Peter-two," she moaned. "I honest-to-goodness didn't mean to be wicked. I just wanted to make you mad, 'cause you said I couldn't. And oh, dear, oh, dear, I did, I did! Don't you think you could forgive me, Peter, when I'm so awful sorry and confessed, and give you my book for reparation—rest—making up? Couldn't you forgive me, not anyway at all, Peter-two?"

"You're spoiled," said Peter, sternly, not hard-heartedly precisely, but with a sense of obligation to make the most of this opportunity. "I've said all along you were dreadfully spoiled, and you are. You're getting worse, Anne, and this was pretty bad. It won't hurt you to do penance."

"All right, Peter-two," said little Anne, swallowing her rising sobs. "Wha—what'll I do?"

"Oh, I don't care what you do! Think of the harm you've done. Go sit in a tree, or stand in the river. I don't care what you do! I'm sick of the whole business, and I'm going to get some gingerbread and study. Go on and let me alone."

Little Anne looked at him with mournful dark eyes; the hollows which so quickly showed below them deep and dark.

"Before I go, Peter-two," she said, softly, "won't you please, please kiss me and tell me you'll forgive me by and by, after my penance?"

"Anne, I've told you not to bother me!" Peter spoke in a sternly parental tone. "Certainly I shall not kiss you; why should I, when you've put me in such a position? I will decide about forgiving you when I see whether or not you mean to behave yourself in the future."

Feeling that he had dealt with little Anne in a manner that was for her welfare, and regretting that his mother could not see this object lessen in the proper way to discipline her, Peter left the room and little Anne's stricken face to go after gingerbread, in the consumption of which his adult manner was lost.

He was in his room when his mother returned. She called him to ask if he knew where Anne was.

He did not. He had been too busy to think about her, he said, appearing at the head of the stairs. He further guessed she was around. But she was not. Bibiana, the waitress, had not seen her since she gave her lunch. She admitted having thought that the child was not so hungry as she might have been.

Mrs. Berkley telephoned the mother of Monica, little Anne's favourite playmate, but Anne was not with Monica. She called up other houses, but there was no news of the child.

Peter, listening to the telephoning with his bedroom door open, began to feel an uneasiness which he did not intend to betray to his mother. It was uncomfortable not to know where Anne was, remembering how sternly he had disciplined her for her confessed and repented fault, had refused to forgive her immediately or to seal the forgiveness with the kiss that she had implored.

Peter sauntered downstairs with a manner exaggeratedly casual, his cap on the back of his head.

"Oh, don't go away, Peter!" cried his mother. "I am beginning to feel uneasy about Anne."

"Oh, Anne's all right!" Peter assured her. "I won't be long. I thought maybe I'd make her hurry home; I thought you were getting worried by the way you were telephoning all over. I'll tell her to hurry in and not worry you."

"Oh, Peter, it sounds as though you did know where she was!" cried Mrs. Berkley.

"Not hard to guess," said Peter, and slammed the door before his mother could ask what his guess was and he should have to confess to having in mind nowhere that she had not already interrogated. Once out of sight his nonchalance fell from him like the mask that it was. He pulled his cap down over his forehead and set out on a run. He made speed to find Anne Dallas, feeling that in some unforeseen way she could help him.

"Gee, if only I had kissed the kid!" he thought, nameless forebodings gripping him.

Anne Dallas knew nothing of little Anne; Mrs. Berkley had already called her to ask, she told Peter. He thought that she looked ill and her eyes were swollen; there was reason for his own fright, then, if Miss Dallas was worried to this extent over Anne.

"Oh, I knew Mother'd call you up," Peter said, shifting from foot to foot as he stood. "But I sort of thought if you didn't know where she was maybe you'd come home with me, talk to Mother till Father gets there—though Anne must come before he does!" he interrupted himself hastily. "Joan couldn't come at this time very well—baby goes to bed, and Antony gets in early—and Mother's kind of worried. Women do worry a whole lot over their children." Peter gave Anne the benefit of his unique experience.

"I'll go this minute," said Anne. "My hat is right here."

"You see Anne was feeling down in the mouth on account of

something she'd done to me," Peter said as they walked along, unable to restrain this confidence.

"She took your thesis. Yes, but she went home to tell you and beg for forgiveness, so that's all right now. Isn't it?" Anne cried, frightened by Peter's expression. Then, as he did not answer, she understood.

"Oh, dear! And she is such an emotional child! Oh, poor Peter! But of course no harm can have befallen her," Anne said, laying her hand on Peter's arm.

Mrs. Berkley welcomed Anne without many words. She clasped her hand, and said: "Thank you, dear!"

Peter went past them up to his room again. It was getting late.

After lunch that day Kit Carrington had found his home and its inmates beyond his power to endure. He was seized with an attack of nerves, made evident by his restlessness of body and complete repose of tongue.

In vain had Miss Carrington tried to involve him in plans of her own. Equally in vain had Helen offered suggestions that were practically requests to Kit to do one of several things which would have sufficiently amused her. Kit had one of his most obtuse fits; he met both his aunt and Helen with polite obstinacy and mental deafness.

It ended in his going off to his room and getting himself into his fishing clothes, taking his rod, and starting off to fish the river for a long afternoon of his own unshared companionship.

He was too unused to introspection to know what ailed him; indeed the symptoms were confused and contradictory. He felt at once unhappy and glad; heavily dull and restless; filled with vague expectation that seemed to urge him on, he did not know whither, as if something glorious awaited him just around the corner; yet pain that was almost despair flooded him, as if all the meaning and value were out of life.

"Well, good gracious, I wonder what's wrong with me! Must be getting sick," thought Kit as he realized the civil warfare within him. All day long Anne Dallas had been before him, alluring, desirable, close to his mind, yet removed, as if she had died.

"Funny!" thought simple Kit.

Later, his aunt returning from a walk in the woods, might have offered him a solution, if he would admit telepathy as a premise.

He began to find the quiet of fields a balm to his perturbed spirits. The woods, when he came to them and entered them, quieted him still more.

"Why didn't I bring poor old Sirius? What a brute I am to forget him when he so loves this sort of excursion and gets so few!" Kit reproached himself. "Just the trip for a dog! Well, that's queer! There's little Anne's beagle, Cricket. Wonder if I could persuade him to join me? He's such a scared beggar! Still, he's getting reconciled to me. Here, Cricket, Cricket, you bundle!"

Cricket came cautiously in wide loops toward Kit, wagging his body deprecatingly, expressing a hope which he was not convinced had sufficient foundation.

"Flattered, I'm sure, that you trust me to this extent, young misanthrope!" Kit patted the dog with a finger tip, and followed it up with his palm. "Seems to me you act queer, but then you are always such an absurdity that it's hard telling! I suspect that you came out after rabbits, sir, and are properly ashamed! Though a man with a fishing rod is no moralist to impress you, eh? Well, Cricket, I admit your reasoning."

Kit got out his bait and began to fish. Cricket left him, returned, whined, and curved himself imploringly; went away again, returned again, barked, and finally disappeared.

Kit paid slight attention to the beagle's vagaries. He fished

along the bank, waded out into the stream, sat for a time upon a rock and fished from there, whistling softly, forgetful of the perturbation which had sent him out to look for peace.

"Pretty good fun to invite your soul and have no one else at your exclusive party," thought Kit, recognizing his own pleasure and that it was satisfying, though he had taken no fish. "Must get back, I suppose, when there's a fair lady to dine. But I'm going to try that other place first."

"That other place" lay farther up the river. It was a quiet spot, shaded by over-hanging branches. He strode to it in his rubber boots, his walking shoes hung across his shoulders by their knotted lacings. He walked in the water, finding it more comfortable with his boots on than land; he noticed how cold the river was still, although there had been several days of considerable warmth.

"Well, now for a last try!" Kit thought as he came to the spot which he had in mind.

There on the river bank sat Cricket piteously whining.

"Anne! Little Anne!" shouted Kit.

Mid-stream stood little Anne, her skirts gathered up in her hands, her bare, slender legs shaking beneath her as the ice-cold river lapped them to the knees.

When Kit called her name she turned to him a disfigured, tear-swollen face and fell forward into the water. He strode out to her and gathered her up in his arms. She was unconscious and her poor little body was as cold as the dead.

"Oh, Lord, and so far from everything!" thought Kit.

He did not dally to consider. Casting away his rod and basket he set out on a run toward the town, holding Anne close to his breast. Cricket streamed after them, but Kit had been a sprinter and an all-around athlete; the beagle's short bowed legs stood no chance at keeping up.

It seemed to Kit that he made no sort of time; he cursed his

impeding rubber boots fervently; in reality, he covered the distance to the nearest drug store at a record speed.

He laid little Anne on the counter, still unconscious, and supported her head on one arm.

"Brandy!" he gasped.

"Artificial respiration," said the bland but frightened druggist, prompt with first-aid knowledge.

"She's not drowned; it's exhaustion. She fainted, fell into the river. Brandy, man! Don't stop to talk!" Kit ordered.

"You know, Mr. Carrington, I can't sell brandy without a doctor's prescription," said the druggist with finality.

It is certain that Kit's exclamation was accounted to him as righteousness, for it sprang from love for little Anne.

"Give it and don't sell it then, you idiot!" he said, savagely. "Give the child brandy and I'll give you a present later. Good heavens, is this child to lie here in this state while I stalk a doctor? Who's to know what's done here, anyway? You use my name; you know me. I'll be responsible. But I swear I won't be responsible for what I do to you if you don't get a move on you, quick! And I'm some boxer, if you want to know." Kit glared furiously at the small man with the timorous air and the druggist got down a bottle.

"It's the law, Mr. Carrington; I'm not to blame, and I certainly don't want to get into trouble breaking laws," he said, pouring a little brandy into a glass.

"Get a spoon," Kit ordered, disregarding him.

He poured the liquor down little Anne's throat and chafed her wrists. The druggist rubbed her legs.

"What happened to her?" he ventured to ask, plainly doubtful of Kit's patience. "Who is she?"

"Mr. Peter Berkley's child. I don't know what happened. She was standing in the water and fainted just as I came along to fish," said Kit. Little Anne opened her eyes with a sigh.

"Was it enough? Is it all right?" she murmured and closed her eyes again.

"It was a heap too much, little Anne," said Kit, tenderly. "Help me get off her wet dress and lend me something to wrap around her, can't you? Haven't you a coat?"

"I have a blanket which I use when I sleep in the store," said the druggist. "Easy to see you have no little girls, Mr. Carrington. Now I have; two. You unbutton their dresses this way."

"Oh, please don't, Kit! I'd much rather be undressed at home," little Anne implored.

"You shall be. Only this wet dress, Nancy-Bell, and then I'll roll you up in a blanket——"

"Seventy times as high as the moon," murmured little Anne, feebly submitting.

"Another 'wee deoch and doris,' Anne!" said Kit putting the teaspoon to her lips. And this time little Anne could help herself.

Kit rolled her up in the blanket which the druggist produced and which he could not help being glad to see was a bright-coloured Navajo; he wanted little Anne to be wrapped in something cheerful.

"I'll be back to-morrow and bring the blanket and some money. I haven't any with me. I beg your pardon for cussing you, but time counts in such a case—so does a stimulant!" said Kit, as he shouldered his precious burden and went away.

Little Anne rallied enough to want to explain.

"It was penance, Kit, dear," she said. "I did a fearful thing to Peter-two and he couldn't forgive me yet. He told me to do penance and said stand in the river when I said what kind. He wouldn't kiss me. So I did it. It's a cold, an awful cold penance, Kit!" Little Anne shuddered.

"Oh, little Anne, didn't you know Peter didn't mean that? Fancy, penance! It sure *was* cold! What a foolish child you

were! If only it hasn't harmed you! Were you there long?" demanded Kit, anxiously.

"I don't know; I think so. Peter-two gets home half-past two, or something, and I went pretty soon. I'm sleepy, Kit. Is Mother worried? I forgot my mother." Anne spoke wearily.

"Dear, I don't know about going to sleep; perhaps it would harm you. You see I don't know what it might do to you. Keep awake, little Anne! Let me tell you how worried your Cricket was about you, and how he tried to say there was something wrong." Kit accompanied the homeward journey with chatter about the beagle to which little Anne faithfully strove to listen, but her heavy lids would not stay open.

When Mrs. Berkley, her husband, Peter, crowded to the door with terror-stricken faces, seeing Kit coming and what he bore, little Anne was asleep.

"Kit?" Mrs. Berkley managed the word, but could ask no more.

"I don't know, Mrs. Berkley; she's not hurt; she may be harmed," Kit answered her.

He relinquished little Anne to her father and watched her family as they gently turned away the blanket from the thin face, now crimson, with pinched lips.

"I found her standing in the river. She had some sort of an idea of doing penance; of course, one of little Anne's queer notions," Kit said, for with a groan as his words to little Anne came back to him, Peter bolted.

"We'll put her to bed. Sometime I can thank you, Kit, dear," said Mrs. Berkley.

Little Anne's father did not speak and he had no hand to give. He nodded to Kit, tears streaming down his face, and carried the child upstairs.

From the corner where she had sat, forgotten, Anne Dallas now emerged.

She looked haggard; it had been a day of intense emotions. She felt embarrassed to speak to Kit. She had just learned that he was to marry Helen Abercrombie, and that she herself was beloved by Richard Latham. The face of the world had changed. But Kit looked so surprised, so glad to see her, he seized her hand so cordially, that she could not help responding to his warmth. Why had she been disinclined to speak to him in the first place? she wondered. He was the same fine boy; nothing had happened to alter their friendship.

"Are you going?" he asked. "I'll walk with you, please. I'm troubled about little Anne. She fainted dead when she saw me, been standing no end of time, and the water is like ice to-day. Good heavens, if she has pneumonia!"

"Heaven forbid!" said Anne.

Her heart leaped with pleasure at Kit's kindness, his anxiety, the warmth of his love for the child. She glowed with joy that he was so good.

"Saint Christopher bore a little Child out of the water, across to safety, you know. Let us hope he will bless this Christopher's rescue," she said, softly.

Kit stared. "What nice things you think of; sweet, womanly, lovely things," he said, simply, and took Anne home.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Making Alive*

**D**URING three days and for as many long nights Anne Dallas lived intensely in unrealities. Richard Latham was not inclined to talk; she herself was submerged in feeling that silenced words. It seemed to her that it blanketed thought, yet all the time she was thinking intently and, unknown to herself, was reaching conclusions. She worked fast, for Richard was working fast; she rapidly took down notes for the first part of his third act, and was aware somewhere in her brain behind her absorption that he was dictating to her lines which surpassed himself at his previous best.

Little Anne Berkley was dangerously ill. Pneumonia had developed on the second day after her pitiful penance, and, little-Anne-like, she was having it hard. Anne Dallas and Richard Latham were surprised to find what a large place in their days and hearts the child had filled. The thin little body as it lay prostrate in its fight for life cast a shadow over the house in Latham Street. His anxiety stimulated Richard to better work, but in Anne's mind fear for little Anne aggregated to her personal anxiety and benumbed her further. The world had grown still, hushed by anxiety; she was feeling so intensely that she seemed not to feel.

Nor did the shadow of little Anne's suffering darken only the poet's house. Kit was so afflicted by her danger that he hovered constantly around the Berkley door, getting bulletins many

times a day, bringing preposterous gifts to the child who could not see them.

Once, when she was sleeping, Mrs. Berkley took Kit up to look at her. She lay with a disreputable doll beside her, her face so pinched, her breathing so laboured, the look of suffering, of imminent death so stamped upon her that Kit groaned aloud. Mrs. Berkley led him away as little Anne stirred.

"It's bad, Kit, dear, but we are hoping and praying," she said with such a brave smile that when Kit got down to where Antony Paul was waiting for him he broke down.

Peter sat with his head in his hands, bowed over his knees. He looked up fiercely as he heard Kit sob.

"She isn't your little sister. How do you suppose I feel?" he demanded. "There never was such a kid as Anne. Joan isn't in the same class, Antony, no matter what you say. More brains than all the other children in town put together, and never a fresh thing about her; sweet, obedient, pious! And I wouldn't forgive her for a clever little trick that I ought to have enjoyed; yes, been proud to think she was smart enough to work it! Wouldn't kiss her! Oh, my Lord! Anne, Anne! Told her to go stand in the river for penance, when she was so sorry, the little saint! Wouldn't kiss her!"

Down went Peter's head again and his shoulders heaved.

"See here, old chap, we haven't lost her yet. You know what to do. Get out and do it. I believe she'll be given back to us," said Antony, his arm laid across poor Peter as tenderly as a woman's. Kit watched and wondered, but Peter understood Antony. He drew his arm across his eyes, got his cap, and went out without a word.

Kit went miserably home. Aside from his sense of personal loss, it seemed to him unbearable that a child so young, so vital as little Anne should die. He had not meditated so profoundly on the mysteries of life in all the brief time that he had lived it

as he found himself doing on his way home that afternoon. He distinctly shrank from going into the metallic brightness of his aunt and Helen's presence from the sublime patience that he divined in Mrs. Berkley, and the solemnity of little Anne, clothed in the mystery of suffering and death.

He was met at the door by Helen, her face all gentle commiseration.

"I am sure that you have nothing good to tell me, Kit, but Anne?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Not either sort of news. Of course there's a chance she may pull through."

"Kit, don't feel so sorry. I can't bear to see it. But if you are sorry don't exclude me as you do. What makes you? I'm not absolutely inhuman!" Helen smiled, but she looked hurt.

"She's a nice child. You don't like children," said Kit, dangerously near to rudeness. "It's not excluding, Nell. What's the use of talking about things, anyway?"

Kit went upstairs, leaving Helen where she stood. As he went he was conscious that he would not have asked Anne Dallas what was the use of talking about things; he knew that it would be the greatest comfort to him to go to her and discuss little Anne and his recent thoughts. But, he reminded himself, this was explained by Anne's love for the sick child.

The next afternoon he did go to Richard Latham's. He was shown directly into the peaceful room where Anne Dallas and the poet were sitting.

"Do I interrupt work?" Kit asked, pausing in the doorway.

"No, indeed; all done for to-day," said Richard. "Kit, have you bad news?" he added.

"Oh, your face says so!" exclaimed Anne; Richard had caught the note of strain in his voice.

Kit came in and dropped heavily into a chair.

"I don't know; I suppose it is not anything portentous.

They are waiting for the crisis, now; it's near. Poor little girl!" He paused, and Richard patted him on the shoulder.

"We are all broken up here, too," he said.

"But there is something else, some change?" Anne asked.

"She was conscious this morning and in the night," said Kit.

"She has been conscious a good deal, they say. She asked what day this was, and when they said Thursday, she asked if it was Corpus Christi? I don't know what that means, but——"

"Yes, I do. I've seen it kept abroad, processions, and——"

Richard began, but Kit interrupted him.

"Well," he said, indifferently. "But the point is that this was the day on which little Anne and some other children were to go to Communion for the first time, and that through her pain the poor mite had kept track of the days, somewhere in her fevered brain. And Joan told me that the priest came and she did—what do they say?—make her First Communion this morning. And afterward she said—isn't this like her?—'I didn't know my white dress for to-day would be my nightie.' That sort of broke me up." Kit choked, and neither Anne nor Richard spoke.

"Well, little Anne's father and Antony Paul were to get flowers for her to give to the church. So they bought them for her room. Her mother took me up. It was full of flowers, but Anne was not conscious when I was there. They said she'd asked to have them taken to the church; Peter was going to take them. They—the priest—he gave her—what did Joan say? He anointed her for death. Little Anne!"

Kit's voice had been getting more unsteady; it stopped altogether and he dropped his face into his hands.

Anne was crying softly, but Richard said, though the effort was audible:

"I've been told they often recover, those who receive Extreme Unction. I am unable to believe that little Anne will die.

Something tells me that she is coming here one of these fine summer days to tell us extraordinary things of her fight with death, just as she has so often said strange things of her experiences in life. We won't grieve till we must, dear Kit, and dear other Anne. I am hopeful."

"Poets have visions withheld from us. We will trust this poet and hope!" said Anne, trying to smile. "I wonder why this slender little creature has so deeply entered our hearts? It really seems to me that I could not bear to see little Anne lying dead."

"I only know that she has crawled into our hearts," said Kit. He went away comforted. Not only was Richard Latham's hopefulness a relief when he had felt that little Anne was doomed, but in an intangible way it seemed to Kit that Anne Dallas had drawn near to him, that her tears had been shed so close to him that he had wiped them away, comforting her. It was not a reasonable feeling, but reason and feeling are often opposed terms. In their love for this little child he and Anne were one. How easily that oneness might go further!

Kit's simplicity accepted the oneness and rested upon it. His was a nature inclined to believe in all that was good, even in good things coming to him. And perhaps the impression of sympathy was not mistaken, whatever might come of it. He slept little that night. The greater part of it he spent in a chair at the window, gazing out on the silent world, at the watching stars.

It seemed to him now like something inconceivably solemn, rather than sad, that little Anne might have passed out from this visible beauty. He had only the vaguest ideas of what the sacraments which the child had received meant, but "anointing for death" had a sound as awesome as the sweep of Azrael's wings. It lifted the child beyond the little creature whom he had known and loved, the precocious, innocent, elfin, spiritual child, full of contradictory charm; she was now become merely a soul,

a passing soul, set apart and chosen to know at the dawn of life all that man had yearned to fathom.

He no longer cared to keep her. It was as if it were too stupendous a matter for human desire to interfere in it, that little Anne must be left alone to go on or come back, the decision untrammelled.

Kit's thoughts turned calmly to Anne Dallas; they partook of the mood wrought by little Anne's apotheosis. Anne Dallas loved him! Wonderful, impossible once to have believed as this was, it seemed to Kit quite certain. He did not know why, he could not have given a reason for this certainty, but when one knows a thing beyond question it would be absurd to ask for proof.

He felt uplifted. Little Anne was close to infinity; he and Anne were blessed in their closeness to each other. It was a profound, a restful conviction. There would flow from it, Kit realized, intensely vital action, but now it sufficed to rest in it, conscious feeling absorbed. In a frame of mind in which he did not recognize himself Kit passed the night. It was not unlike the vigil of a youth beside his arms on the eve of knight-hood.

As the east began to redden Kit dozed, his arms on the window-sill pillowing his head. He roused and shook himself as boys and dogs shake themselves after a nap, and went downstairs, winding his forgotten watch as he went, setting it by the tall clock on the landing. He was surprised to see that it was after seven.

He went out on the steps, intending to go to the Berkley house to ask for news. He shrank from ringing the sharp telephone bell in that house which he pictured as filled with the silence of oppressive grief. For now, though the rising sun usually brings hope after the night's despair, Kit felt sure that little Anne was dead.

As he came out he saw on the bottom step of his aunt's house a figure. It sat huddled, arms folded, head pillowed, knees drawn up, bowed forward in a heap that for a moment prevented recognition. Then Kit saw that it was young Peter Berkley.

"Peter!" he cried, and went down to lay his hand on the boy's shoulder.

Peter jumped and sat up, rubbing his eyes, bewildered.

"Must have dropped off," he apologized. "I'm not used to being awake all night, and this was the third one. I was awake pretty much all of the two before this one. I thought I'd stop and see you, but I hated to ring, didn't hear any one stirring in the house. When I sat down I guess I went right off."

"Have you been here long?" asked Kit, not daring to ask the question that was uppermost in his mind.

"Don't know what time it is now," said Peter. "I got here about ten minutes to seven, I suppose. I went around to serve Mass at six. That's the first one. I had to go."

"Did you?" Kit's voice was as softly pitying as Peter's mother's could have been. "Is that what you do when——"

"It's what you want to do. You can't thank God yourself; you're not big enough," said Peter, simply. "What I came to tell you, Kit, is that Anne's pulled through."

"Living? Going to live?" Kit shouted.

Peter nodded. "The crisis was last night about one. She got through it like the little sport she is. The doctor stayed and helped all he could, but he said it was her heart won out. He says her heart's fine this morning, so it's sure she'll get well with proper care. Think she won't get it? The doctor doesn't know how true what he said was. Say, don't you think it was little Anne's heart? She's such a good kid and tries so hard to do what she's told."

Kit nodded. He found it hard to speak, but he patted Peter's

shoulder steadily, as though something would go wrong if he stopped.

"I knew how you'd feel," said Peter, stretching his weary muscles. "Got to go on home now. I haven't had anything to eat yet, and I don't believe we had dinner; I can't seem to remember. Isn't that funny? I didn't go to bed; I lit right out for the six—Mass at six, I mean. I'm going to serve that one for nine days; it takes something to get up at five. That's a novena I'm going to make."

Kit understood the boy's elisions, being still a boy in spite of his approaching third decade.

"Well, Peter, I'd know you'd be thankful," Kit said. "I am, too. I'd like it if I knew how to do something to show I'm thankful."

"Oh, thankful!" Peter seemed to inhale the word. "Well, say! If Anne had died from standing in the river when I was such a fool and a brute as to say what I did to her—Thankful! Well, say!"

The boy walked away, head up, but shoulders heaving.

Kit stood for a few moments on the steps, his head thrown back, the sunshine on his face. He looked radiant but stunned.

"I didn't think she'd make it!" he said aloud. "I was sure when I saw Peter sitting here she hadn't made it. Gracious, but I *am* glad! Anne will be glad. I must call and tell her."

Anne received Kit's message at her boarding place. She hurried her breakfast and went to Latham Street earlier than usual to take the joyful news there.

Richard Latham received it as a twice-told tale, not the less welcome.

"The dear little thing!" he said. "But I felt sure that she was safe. The first thing I thought when I wakened was that little Anne was all right. But it is joyful to be confirmed by

certainly. How glad you are! I can feel the happiness radiating from you like an electric current!"

"Indeed I am happy!" cried Anne. "I love the child, but it's not that alone. That is such a dear family, so simple, so united, so loving that I couldn't endure the thought of their loss of little Anne. Though perhaps it would have been better to let her slip away to the heaven she's so fond of talking about."

"Nonsense!" said Richard, briskly. "That's a morbid, wrong notion. Life is a gift. A wicked life is the gift thrown away, but do you really think there is great danger of little Anne's conscience ever abandoning her to a misspent life—or of her abandoning her conscience, more correctly? Anne's conscience is as intrinsic to her as her heart, or any other vital organ! She'll be a good woman. So I'm mighty glad she's to live to make a happier world, as her mother has done. How good it will be to have her around again! How did you hear about her?"

"Kit Carrington telephoned me. Peter Berkley had been there to tell Kit, and he knew that I—we—would be eager to hear," said Anne.

"Ah! Well, that was kind of him; we were eager to hear," said Richard. Anne did not see his face; he turned and left the room as he spoke, but she heard the change in his voice that answered to a drooping body.

"You do not feel too perturbed to work to-day?" Richard suggested when Anne followed him to the living room a few minutes later. There was no note of regret in his voice now.

"Dear me, no!" laughed Anne. "I feel more like work than usual; there is a load rolled off, isn't there?"

Anne had set down her problem in accurate figures, and had solved it. There was nothing in the way of her making Richard as happy as she could make him, except selfishness. She wanted the love that had not come to her, which was to her the ideal

approach to marriage. This ideal was the true one, but her case was altered by circumstances. First of all, there was no one whom she loved better than Richard Latham. If there were, she could not have been untrue to that love, whether or not it led to joy. Richard Latham was not only a man to be honoured for his genius, pitied for his blindness, but he was a man to be loved for himself. Rarely would any woman find in one person the qualities which he united in himself; the manliness with the delicacy; the tenderness with the courage; the unbending austerity with the unfailing mercy. He could love a woman as few men could love one; he would idealize her while protecting her; serve her in all humility, yet expect from her all the goodness and strength that was in her. Anne had decided that if Richard really were giving her this power and wanted her, it was not for her to refuse his wealth, nor further impoverish one who had been so bereft. Having reached her decision, she went serenely on her way, characteristically debating it no more; ready to give if the demand were made, desiring nothing except not to fail either Richard or herself.

This morning Richard resumed the dictation of his third act; Anne, pen in hand, set down the cabalistic signs which Richard had once accused of signifying more than he could produce.

Suddenly she paused, her pen suspended, a shocked expression on her face.

"But, Mr. Latham, why are you saying this?" she cried. "What are you doing with this act? This dialogue? You are turning it all wrong!"

"No," said Richard. "I am not going to follow my first plan. Our friend, the hero, is not to be made happy, after all! I am separating him from his beloved. They are not to marry, as we meant them to. It won't affect the two preceding acts; it will merely make another play of it, perhaps a sadder one, but not a weaker one—better, I think. Don't you approve?"

"Indeed I do not!" cried Anne. "Why do you want to martyr him? And to frustrate that beautiful, ideal love! It's unbearable! I can't take the dictation that does this! And really, Mr. Latham, it will frustrate the play as well as the hero's life. Don't you think we all want the happy ending? It is always possible to get it in a play or a story! I'm sure the public will rebel, that your play will never succeed if you change your plot. No one ever drew a more ideal love than you have in the acts already written. And to spoil it all, sever these two who have dared for each other, borne for each other with such courage, yet so nobly, so wisely! Oh, why do you want to do it?"

"What a little enthusiast!" said Richard. "I am forced to do it. I can't tell you why, Anne—Miss Dallas—but I've wholly lost the power to end it as I at first intended. It's got to be a tragedy, a bloodless but poignant tragedy. I don't know any other ending. I'll make our nice girl happy with the nice youth, but for the man——" He shook his head after a moment's hesitation. "I know no other end," he repeated.

Anne laid down her pen. Her face wore an uplifted look, unlike the look with which a woman goes to her lover, but nevertheless she arose and went to her lover. She knelt beside him and took his hand.

"Why do you know no happy end for him?" she asked.

"Anne!" cried Richard Latham. "What are you doing? What do you mean? Anne, Anne—what do you know?"

"I know that if there were any one whom you wanted, Richard Latham, she would be a happy, a blessed woman." Anne spoke hardly above a whisper, yet her words were clearly audible in the intense quiet of the room. Richard bent toward her, but pulled himself back.

"Do you mean—Anne, stop this! I love you. What right have you——"

"Perfect right, Richard," said Anne, and lifted his hand to lay it on her bowed head.

"Oh, my God!" cried Richard, with a sob in his throat.

Then he leaped to his feet and caught her up in his arms and held her tight, kissing again and again her soft masses of hair, her closed eyes, at last her lips.

"Oh, my God, my good kind God," he said, hoarsely. "How can it be true?"

## CHAPTER XIII

### *The Ill Wind*

IT WAS with no small satisfaction that Kit learned that his aunt and Helen were to spend that day and the greater part of the next one in the large city three hours distant, returning to Cleavedge only in time for dinner. There was upon Kit an unwrapping profundity of isolation, a peace with which the elder and younger woman were in ill-accord; it was a relief to know that duty would not summon him out of his personal atmosphere to breathe theirs.

That afternoon he spent in the woods, contentedly wandering, for some time sleeping on the moss; his vigil of the preceding night had made him drowsy. This time he had not forgotten to invite his old dog, Sirius, the English setter who had been his comrade for years, to bear him company. On his way to enjoy the silence which he craved, he had stopped at the Berkleys' to get confirmation of the good news of the morning.

Mrs. Berkley had cried on his shoulder as if he had been Peter, grown taller, and as she had not cried when little Anne was in mortal danger. Kit had patted her back and ended by kissing her with warmth in his heart: it seemed to him that at last his lonely boyhood had ended in his finding kindred.

All the while the permeating sense of Anne Dallas' nearness, the fact that he loved her and that she knew it and that everything was all right, made at once the foundation and crown of this blessed day. He went on to the woods to brood over this sense of blessedness; not to think of it precisely, not at

all to debate, nor demonstrate it, but to yield to its exquisite bliss.

Humility is the handmaid of perfect faith. Kit was not conceited, but he was sure of Anne's love; he did not know why he felt sure of it, nor would he have said that there was any reason why she should love him, but he knew that she did, and he humbly gave himself up to the wondering joy of it.

"If you know a thing you know it," Kit would have said, and that was all. He went whistling homeward as the loveliness of the sunshine of the last days of May began to be veiled with the poetical beauty of its westward lengthening.

He ate a dinner that was unromantically hearty, but which was flavoured with romance and elevated into the sacramental. It occurred to him that he should not always eat alone, nor at his aunt's table; that one unspeakable day he should raise his eyes and see Anne sitting in her quiet loveliness opposite to him. It took his breath away to think that he should carve a thin slice of the breast for her and lay it on her plate, with a spoonful of the dressing; it was to be her second helping. His hand would brush hers and she would be sure to say, "Not so much, Kit, dear!"

He should watch her put smooth brown gravy, with dots of chopped things in it, over his potato, and should tell her, in the indifferent tone of blessed accustomedness, not to put any on the side of the plate which he had left for the cranberry jelly.

It was a fairy dream, though its terms, put into English, would have sounded prosaic enough, but of all miracles the most divine are the homely ones. Not least of these is the miracle that the radiant wings of youthful love can be folded close to brood upon a hearth. This was what Kit's true instinct revealed to him, and moved and ecstatic over the vision of Anne, his wife, he ate, unconscious of what he was eating.

After dinner he went at once to the piazza and sat smoking slowly, watching the moon rise, sufficiently companioned in

knowing that he was to see Anne on the morrow, so content in this strange, new conviction of the possession of her that he was satisfied to delay the joy of seeing her in the effulgence of this new light. As long as he knew it was but delayed! If he were not going to see her thus that would be another, a tragic matter!

Kit went to bed early and slept like a tired, happy boy, and arose early to begin another happy day; an endless succession of such days stretched out ahead of him, to that inconceivable day when Anne and he should be old.

He was disappointed when, in the afternoon, he went to Latham Street, to be told that the poet, with Miss Dallas, had gone in Richard's small car, driven by Stetson, to visit the falls, which were the point of pilgrimage for all strangers who came to Cleavedge. The falls were some miles distant, where the river gathered itself together and hurled itself down over rocks.

"Well, it's a fine day to go there, and the falls are still swollen by the spring rains," said Kit, sorry for himself, but resigned to others' better luck.

"I wanted to tell Miss Dallas—and Mr. Latham—that I stopped at Mrs. Berkley's on my way here, and that the little girl has not an unfavourable symptom. It's quite certain now that she will live. You might tell Mr. Latham when he comes in, if you will, please. I'll see Miss Dallas to-night at her boarding place."

Mrs. Lumley, the housekeeper, Minerva's gossip, who happened to be in the hall when Kit sounded the knocker, and so had exceeded her obligations and opened the door, looked at him with significant commiseration.

"Miss Dallas is going to dine here to-night, Mr. Carrington," she said. "Mr. Latham is going to pick up an elderly lady who he's great friends with, and bring her to dinner with him to-night. And Miss Dallas is to come with 'em."

There was a note in Mrs. Lumley's voice that arrested Kit's

attention, but then he was not familiar with her voice, and it glanced off the surface of his mind as it vibrated against it.

"I'm disappointed to hear that," said Kit, "but it's pleasanter for Miss Dallas. It's a tiresome trip to the falls and Miss Dallas finds it a bore, at best, to board. I did hope to see her! Oh, well, one more day! And there are many days."

He smiled the smile that made everybody his friend and turned to go, saying "good-day" to Mrs. Lumley.

"It is truly said, Mr. Carrington, that it is pleasanter dining here than at her boarding place. This is a beautiful house, so cunning seers tell me; let alone Mr. Latham's being even more agreeable as a man than as a poet. And it is true that there are many days. There are many of most things, Mr. Carrington; fish in the sea and much besides. So it is well to keep our minds on this well-known fact so's't not to let ourselves feel's if there wasn't hardly more than one of a thing, day, or whatever it may be. Good-day, Mr. Carrington; I'll tell Mr. Latham."

"Cryptic cook! Or is she the cook?" thought Kit, amused yet vaguely disturbed. "Sounds like the oracle hinting disaster. That class of woman eats up anticipation of misfortune and licks the platter clean. Seems as though she grudged Anne her comfort! Maybe she's afraid of automobiles; probably is! But I'm good and ready for a glimpse of my dear. Those Elizabethans had a nice way of calling things: 'a glimpse of my dear!' Now that's nice!"

Kit had mused into less disappointment, but there was still enough left to give him a subdued manner, and to shadow his bright face of the morning as he greeted his aunt and Helen.

He found them on the piazza; their diaphanous gowns showed that they had returned on a train early enough to have allowed them to change to these from their travelling garb. Beside Helen there stood a basket with a small window in one end. Kit's animal-loving eye quickly noted it.

"My gracious! is Helen setting up a pet?" he wondered.

"How are you, Kit?" said Miss Carrington, extending her left hand lazily. "I hope you are all right?" She looked him over sharply. "You look all right! Come, that's good and sensible!"

Helen leaned forward in her chair, holding out her pretty hand.

"It seemed queer to come home and not find you, Kit," she said. "A big boy fills up a house, doesn't he? And his absence fills it up, too—in another way!"

"That's a kind and delicate implication, Nell, but it's like Pudd'n-head Wilson's idea of calling a man a mule; it leaves him in doubt, though the mule is such an admirable character. There are ways and ways of filling up a house, Nell, and boys aren't popular in the rôle."

Kit shook Helen's hand merrily and talked glibly, with a happy carelessness that made the girl stare in her turn.

"You must have liked keeping house alone," she said. "I never saw you look jollier, not even when you played on the winning team, ages ago! What's the news? Are you rejoicing for yourself, or, altruistically, for others?"

She contrived to shake her head at Miss Carrington and signal to her that Kit did not know.

"Just general well-being; that the world is so full of a number of things," answered Kit. "I've been off with Sirius most of the time since you and Auntie went; haven't heard any news whatever. Except that little Anne is coming on splendidly."

"Well, after dinner is the best time for news when there is any," Helen gave Kit the impression of talking nonsense, but Miss Carrington understood the hint that ill news interfered with appetite.

"I knew that the child was going on well the instant that I saw you. What do you think I have in that basket?" Helen asked.

"Couldn't guess! I hope for your soul's sake that you've set up a pet, but I don't dare hope for the best," returned Kit.

"No, Master Christopher, not even for my soul's sake shall I ever set up a pet. I don't do a whole lot for my soul's sake, anyway! But it is a pet, nevertheless. On the strength of the news before we left yesterday, that little Anne was going to live, I bought one for her. I thought an Angora kitten would be the best tonic to hasten on her convalescence. She can have it on the bed with her, and watch it play and strike fascinating attitudes."

Helen was unstrapping the basket as she spoke.

Kit's delight was unmistakable, but his surprise was not flattering.

"What a happy inspiration, Nell!" he cried. "There's nothing like a kitten to entertain an ailing child. How did you ever happen to think of it?"

"A princess of the direct Herodian line, like you!" your too-honest manner implies, my dear!" laughed Helen. "Oh, I am not stupid, though I be heartless, or so I flatter myself! I have been a sick little girl myself. I remember I was most interested in having kittens visit me in those circumstances. I never got attached to them, never wanted to continue the acquaintance, but they did amuse me. Cats have lovely muscles; I still like to watch them. Your Anne—*little* Anne!—is probably a model of affection and will love this catlet personally. It struck me as a delicate compliment, since you are so fond of the child, to give her a kit! How's this?"

She produced from the basket a snowy-white kitten, high-bred, beautiful in every line and in each fluffy hair; its face round and expressive, its eyes still blue, with the look of innocence that only a kitten can wear and to which nothing created since Eden can hope to correspond.

"Oh, jiminy!" cried Kit, as pleased as little Anne would surely

be. "Helen, it beats the world! What a beauty! Little Anne will either die of it, or recover at her first glimpse of it."

He took the kitten from Helen, who held it out by her thumb and forefinger, its legs drawn up into its downy stomach, and nestled it in his neck.

"You small, soft thing!" Kit said.

Helen flushed to her hair. Her eyes gave out a gleam, and she looked, as she felt, as if she would gladly have taken Kit in her arms—so big, so simple, so lovable he seemed with the "small, soft thing" creeping close to him trustingly.

"Give it to the child yourself, Kit, as soon as she is able to bear the emotion it will inspire. I want you to take it to her. Don't say anything about me; let it be your gift. No!" Helen held up a protesting hand. "I don't care to get credit for this sort of thing; I would if I wanted to win the child, but I don't. I'll give you the kitten; you give it to Anne, and we'll all live happy for ever after."

"Anne will be told correctly the tale of your thoughtfulness, of how you brought pussycette to her," said Kit. "What a curious mixture you are, Nell! I wonder if you pose as a metallic creature, and that it is all pose? I'll take this winner to Minerva."

He went away with the kitten purring close to his face, the basket swinging in his hand.

Helen sighed. She turned excited eyes upon Miss Carrington.

"He certainly is an attractive boy," she said. "He doesn't know a thing of the engagement, that's clear. Wait till after dinner. If he does mind, it would be a pity to damage his inspiring appetite. I love to see Kit pitch in!"

At dinner that night Kit certainly "pitched in." He talked more than was his custom and he talked well. Miss Carrington, who was sharply critical of him, not always satisfied with his simplicity, was pleased to hear him announcing opinions on

some of the events of the day, well-expressed, logically thought-out from intelligent premises.

Helen was clever and she had a rare opportunity to learn inside political facts, as well as to acquire skill in marshalling them to conclusions. She spurred Kit on and made him put forth his best powers to cope with her. When they returned to the piazza Kit found himself aroused, thinking fast, conscious of having enjoyed the past hour keenly, as a man must enjoy whatever puts him on his mettle.

"You're a great girl, Helen Abercrombie!" he said with sincere admiration. "You will hold your own if ever you get that salon you dream of, or are launched on a sea wide enough and windy enough for you."

"Helen is the peer of the most brilliant men. She will be a tower of strength to her associates," said Miss Carrington, delighted to see that Kit was impressed.

"Oh, it's hats off! When the governor's daughter passes by! Passes by us all," agreed Kit, so readily that his aunt frowned. She suspected that Kit was thinking that womanly sweetness surpassed Helen's talents. But she said pleasantly:

"Quite right, Kit! I can't help feeling sorry that Richard Latham is going to miss complete intellectual companionship. No matter what nice things he says of her, of course we know that Miss Dallas is not his equal. However, she is a nice, trusty, sympathetic girl, and on the whole I am glad—since he can't have such as Helen, for the good reason that there is none like her!—that he will be taken care of, and at least be secure of the self-sacrificing devotion that a blind man needs. It is hard to keep in mind that he is a blind man; not only a great poet."

"Why do you speak, or did you mean to speak, as though Miss Dallas would marry Mr. Latham?" Kit smilingly asked.

"Oh, don't you know about it?" asked Miss Carrington,

blandly. "I suppose it isn't talked of yet. You should keep a lady's maid, Kit! Here we are just returned and are in possession of facts, while you, right within hail of Cupid, never saw a flash of his arrow!"

"Facts, Aunt Anne? Do you mean *facts*?" Poor Kit spoke with difficulty.

"Surely, Kit, my dear; why not? Isn't an engagement usually a fact? Minerva met Mr. Latham's housekeeper who knows all that the principals themselves know, probably more! Mrs. Lumley—that's the housekeeper—rather resents it. Naturally a woman of her class would resent her employer's marrying below his own. Though I confess I've found Miss Dallas in every way correct, quite like a well-born person. Then Mrs. Lumley would be jealous of authority, a woman's authority over her, where she has reigned supreme. These things embroider the story attractively when Minerva tells it, but they are not intrinsic to the fabric. The important fact, important to us all, since Richard Latham's work will be affected by it—Cleavedge's celebrity's work—is that our poet is engaged to be married to the little brown Dallas girl."

"Aunt Anne, he isn't! What nonsense you—I beg your pardon! I mean what nonsense Minerva talks. It isn't so because—because—it can't be so!" Kit exploded.

Miss Carrington adjusted her glasses the better to look at her nephew. Helen leaned back in her chair somewhat tense, amusement, yet strong annoyance in her face.

"He is hard hit!" she thought, calculating the chances of consolation.

"*Can't* be so, Christopher? But it can be, because it *is* so! Why should it not be true? She is at his hand every moment while he is at work and shares the work with him. She has a nice alto voice, moves well, would not annoy him; why should he not, lonely as he is, be attracted to her?" inquired Miss

Carrington, temperately, ignoring any other side to consider in the matter except the poet's.

"I don't believe it!" Kit almost groaned.

"My dear boy, that sounds rude, but I'm sure you don't mean it so," said his aunt. "Don't you recall my saying that this marriage was certain to come off? Miss Dallas read a poem not intended for her reading—I suspect Mrs. Lumley of eaves-dropping to have known this! Miss Dallas was not dishonourable; she mistook the poem for her work, I've no doubt. In it Richard Latham voiced the love for her which he thought, foolishly, when you consider what he is, that he was forbidden to tell Miss Dallas because he is blind. I talked with Miss Dallas when she had just learned that Latham loved her. We agreed that she was free to admit to herself her love for Richard Latham; that it was now her right, her duty to walk the beautiful way open to her. I have no doubt that she will be happy. He is a rare man. There is no question that they both are now blissfully happy. Miss Dallas is dining there to-night, and Mr. Latham, instructing Mrs. Lumley as to the table, himself told her to put an old lady friend of his, who is also dining there, at his right, but to put Miss Dallas opposite him. 'Though I cannot see her, Mrs. Lumley, I shall know that she is there. I want to say to you that it will not be long before Miss Dallas will preside over my table, seated opposite to me. She has consented to be my wife.' Mrs. Lumley quoted this to Minerva with what I feel sure was dramatic accuracy, for Minerva's repetition of her words carried conviction. I am sure that though she hates the marriage, the housekeeper enjoys having her feelings harrowed! It is really more exciting than a movie, I make no question!"

Miss Carrington laughed her light, amused, tolerant laugh.

With an imprecation Kit shoved back his chair and went away.

He was numb with puzzled incredulity, yet he knew that what

he had heard must be true. How it could be true—how this could follow to-day after his certainty of yesterday, of this afternoon, till this moment—Kit could not think. He could not think about it, anyway. All that he could do was to feel. Poor Kit was one dull ache, stunned by the blow that had fallen upon him. He recalled the significance, the pity with which Richard Latham's housekeeper had regarded him. His secret must be suspected then; he was warranted in his feeling that Anne had understood, if the housekeeper knew.

Kit went to his room and sat by the window at which he had spent the night of anxious vigil before Anne Berkley's fate was decided. Then Anne Dallas had seemed to be with him, sharing his sorrow for the little girl, but also sharing the love which upheld him. He tried to think back to discover what had made him so sure that Anne had understood and had answered to the call of his longing for her, but he could discover nothing that she had done or said.

"I am a fool, an utter, consummate, wretched fool!" he said, aloud. "It's like that pocket knife that I was sure Aunt Anne was giving me on my eighth birthday; she had a set of kid travel books for me! It was only that I wanted that knife so badly! I still remember how I felt when I opened those books! I wanted Anne so much I thought I'd get her. Of course any one would love Latham. He's fine. And it isn't her fault. I—I'm the blind man!"

It was a comfort to decide that Anne was in no wise to blame; it was such a comfort that Kit did what he must have done when he was eight and the knife that he had convinced himself was coming never came. He was alone in his room with no one to see, and he dropped his head on his folded arms and sobbed over his ruined hopes.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Adjustment*

**A**FTER Kit had left them Miss Carrington and Helen remained till late talking earnestly, with their chairs drawn close. Their voices rose and fell—the fall emphasized—in all the earnestness of an important discussion, but never did they rise to the point at which words were distinguishable at any distance.

Minerva passed in and out of the room behind them, and though its windows were open she heard nothing except a clear yet muffled murmur.

“She will know all about it, *plus*, but there is no reason why she should be gratified now,” said Miss Carrington, malice in her eye. At last, when the old clock on the stairway struck eleven, Miss Carrington rose.

“Well, Helen, it will be past midnight before we get our chapter read and are in bed,” she said. “Of course, my dear, you read your nightly chapter? I am sure I can’t predict. Men differ almost as much as other animals; in fact, I’m not sure that they don’t vary more—sorrel horses, black ones, maltese cats—it’s easy to generalize on their traits. I’ve never known Kit under these conditions; I can’t say how he’ll react. It’s notorious that widowers are easily consoled. Still, it is often easier to console a man for the loss of what he had than for what he missed. Death is supposed to soften the hard heart. Kit might easily be caught on the rebound; then, again, he may not rebound, but drop. You handle a racquet well; can you bat him? That’s the wrong term!”

"Serve him?" laughed Helen. "That's the word, and a lovely word it is in this connection."

"Well, I don't know. My recollection is that you serve into another's court, which is not to our liking in this case. I think I mean pick him up; you do that with racquets, don't you? I don't know why I should insist on a tennis term! The whole thing, Helen, is that you are to be nice to my boy, and wisely nice. You will slip along, pussy-footed, your hand on the leader. I believe, from my experience with youngsters, that Kit will learn to lean upon your satisfying comradeship. It can't be more than a fancy for the Dallas girl. He was ready supplied with ideals and she stood convenient, as a sort of rack, to hang them on. That's the explanation of most first love. No harm done, my dear! Except that it is keeping us up, and that is harmful to me at my age! Unless there's something going on, and then tiny hours don't harm me!"

The dauntless old lady laughed and went into the house, Helen following with her forgotten knitting bag.

Kit presented himself at breakfast with the marks of misery on his face. He was not used to unhappiness; aside from the actual pain, the discomfort of its friction hurt him, as a chain galls in addition to its weight. He did not know how to adjust himself to what had happened. He had the good sense to see that the only thing for him to do was to occupy himself with something that demanded genuine effort of body and mind.

"I've got to get at something that I can't fizzle over," is the way he put it to himself.

He had amused himself so far through life successfully, but he instinctively realized that entertainment did not entertain, except when one's light-heartedness might dispense with it.

Helen and Miss Carrington had made a compact to be unconscious of Kit's depression. At breakfast Helen talked happily of inconsequent matters, not to Kit, yet not excluding him;

she did not suggest his sharing any part of that day with her; instead, she announced plans for herself that excluded him. He was grateful for what he mistook for Helen's unintentional mercy to him and rewarded her with a friendly smile as he left the dining room. He had added to his advice to himself while dressing the sane counsel not to show it if he felt sore, and not to be a grouch.

The first necessity upon him was to make an errand to Richard Latham's house to see for himself. There were moments when he did not believe that what he had heard was true, yet at every moment he was surer that it was true.

He found work going on so briskly in the poet's room that, like little Anne on an earlier day, he bestowed himself outside the window to wait. Anne waved her hand, the pen in it, to him, but Richard did not know that he was there.

Where he sat Kit could not help catching every movement that Richard made. They were not many: Richard sat with his head resting against the back of his chair, his voice flowing steadily on, rising and falling so expressively that, though he could not hear the words, Kit found its cadences dramatic, interesting. The poet's slender hands moved ceaselessly, the long fingers rapidly opening, closing, pointing, erect or drooping, but otherwise he was motionless.

The look that passed over Richard's face at intervals when he turned his blind eyes upon Anne; the tone with which he sometimes asked a question that Kit fancied was extraneous to the dictation, gradually destroyed whatever slight hope had lingered.

At last Richard straightened himself, and Anne began gathering up her papers, laying one upon another. Richard held out his hands with a smile that told Kit all that there was to tell. He saw Anne's lips move, though her voice did not reach him, and Richard jumped up to hasten to the door.

"Why, Christopher Carrington!" Richard cried, boyishly.

"What are you doing here? Come in, come in! Glad to see you."

Kit let the poet shake his limp hand, though Kit's tight grasp was famous.

"Good morning, Miss Dallas," Kit said, and Anne greeted him with the sweet cordiality that had always been one of her chief charms.

"It was silly of me to wait," Kit said, "but that's a nice step to sit on! Now it's too late for me to do more than say I'm going."

"Oh, but we have more than that to say to you!" protested Richard. "We've had a great morning, Kit! We've done the third act. And it's a great third act, if I do say it as shouldn't! We've made our notes on it these past two days and to-day we've written it. I needn't hesitate to say it's great, either: Anne did it. She saved it from being a sad third act; she changed the play back to our first idea of it. I was going to spoil it!"

"You don't as a rule," Kit managed to say; he had had too much of the "we" to answer easily.

"There is no rule, Kit, my son!" Richard laughed. "There is no rule, no precedent, because there is no old me! There's not even English grammar left of my old self, you see! All the world is new. Do you know that this is *Anne* now?"

He held out his hands to Anne and she came over to him and laid her own hands into his. She was pale, her eyes cast down, her lips parted as if she were breathing quickly; Kit saw her breast rise and fall. He could not guess that Anne was wondering why she found her new part almost impossible to play. She had been thankful to find herself peacefully, unemotionally happy since she had made Richard ecstatically happy, but now the situation crushed her.

Kit made an attempt to answer, but Richard forestalled him.

"She was Anne all along, you are going to say? Indeed, she was not! She was my devoted, wise, unselfish little secretary, Miss Dallas! But now she is Anne. Don't you see, Kit? We have made a happy end of the play. I didn't know how; I should have spoiled it, but she saved it—and me! We made a happy end of the play, good old Kit!"

Anne raised her eyes and looked at Kit, gravely, steadily. Then she smiled at him. He had no idea of what that smile conveyed; for that matter Anne was equally in the dark. Kit threw back his head, pulled himself together as he had done on the football field more than once when the game demanded him and he was nearly finished. He smiled back at Anne and put out his hand, first to her, then to Richard.

"I had heard something about it," he said, and his voice rang out cheerily. "I suppose, to be honest, that is why I came around to-day and why I waited; I wanted to know. Wish you all sorts of luck, Miss Dallas, and whatever good comes to you won't be luck, you know, after all! Congratulations, Mr. Latham! You surely do deserve the best thing in the world. I know what it is, too, though I don't use your label on it: she's Miss Dallas, not Anne to me, but there's only one best thing, anyway."

"What a trump you are, Kit Carrington!" cried Richard, jumping up and seizing Kit's hands delightedly. "Why, you're a poet yourself! That had the ring of imagination and beauty! Sit down. You're here to lunch, you know."

"Sorry, but I'm not, thanks," said Kit; he could not wait to escape. "I'm on my way to Paul's, Antony Paul's. Miss Abercrombie bought a white Angora kitten for little Anne to play with while she's convalescing. I'm going to find out when it won't be too exciting for her to have it. Good-bye. Thanks for telling me. I don't wonder you made a big thing of the play, Mr. Latham. Good-bye, Miss Dallas."

Kit hastened out of the door, thankful to get into the air, yet tortured in leaving Anne with her betrothed.

If he could have seen how gently Richard touched her hair and let her take the low Greek stool on which she sat to read to him; how tight he clasped his hands lest he forget and draw her to him where he hungered to have her, Kit would have been a little consoled.

Richard knew that Anne shrank from a caress. He loved her for it; it seemed to him part of that rare quality of soul for which he adored her.

It was too soon, he was still too new to the wonder of the happiness that had fallen upon him when he was schooling himself to do without it, to miss in Anne the warmth that would have glowed in her had she loved Richard as he loved her. Thus far Richard was content, and waited as a worshipper to become a lover.

Kit walked fast to the Berkleys'; he had decided to go there first. Very likely Joan was at her mother's, admiring little Anne's progress.

He found that he had been right. The first thing that he saw when he was admitted was the baby, standing beside a chair, her rings of hair exceedingly up-standing and tousled, waving one hand lightly, proudly, to show that she was balancing with but one little fist on the chair seat, yet that she did not disdain to salute a world of her inferiors. The inferiors present—Mrs. Berkley and Joan—made no claim to equality. With a delight that surpassed the baby's, as if countless millions of human beings had not once stood alone for the first time, they waved their hands at Barbara in return, making sounds as rapturously inarticulate as hers. It ended in Joan's swooping down on her, snatching her up, burying her face in Barbara's tiny mound of a stomach and swaying her up and down, till baby and mother were gasping.

"Oh, Kit, forgive us, dear!" cried Mrs. Berkley. "You saw how Barbara stood? Isn't it wonderful, the beginning of living? Think how far those little feet will carry her through the world and beyond the world! Anne is gaining every hour, thank you."

Joan righted the baby, then her clothing, and set her down to her toys on a blanket on the floor, to which Barbara, who was the embodiment of health and hence of contentment, turned with the interest of an hour's separation from them.

"Kit, nice boy, anything wrong?" asked Joan, seeing, now that the baby was settled and she looked well at Kit, that he was changed. Kit sat down on a chair that allowed him to rest an elbow on its arm and shade his face with his hand.

"Richard Latham is going to marry——"

"Anne Dallas!" cried Joan, and exchanged significant looks with her mother. "I was afraid of that; he's so fine and she's so sympathetic——"

"Joan!" warned Mrs. Berkley.

She shook her head hard at her daughter. She and Joan had long suspected that the interest growing up between Anne and Kit was stronger than either had gauged. It would never do to let him know that they feared that Anne loved Richard less than she should love the man whom she married.

Kit made no secret of his unhappiness to these two simple, sweet women.

"He's the finest fellow I ever saw," said Kit. "He's all around fine. Always makes me think of the Round Table, those great old knightly chaps. She couldn't find another like him short of—Camelot!" Poor Kit made a sorry attempt to laugh. "All the same, I'd rather she'd choose someone more ordinary, provided that I could nominate him."

"I, myself, would have selected another sort of man for Anne," said Joan, making up for her narrow escape from indiscretion by

her most mature manner. "I'm sorry, Kit! Mother and I are both sorry, aren't we, Mother?"

"I'm profoundly sorry if Kit minds," said Mrs. Berkley, gently. "I think Kit means us to understand that he does mind. Anne is a dear girl; she is worth loving. But I've no doubt it will make you a nicer boy than ever to carry a cross, though we can't endure seeing your young shoulders bend, dear Kit, and you are nice enough now, in all conscience! Little Anne will stand by! You will have lots of help, dear, and win through with benefit from the experience. Little Anne has been asking when she should see you. Would you like to see her?"

Mrs. Berkley rose and laid her arm over Kit's shoulder as she would have over her Peter. Kit rested his head against her for a moment, and felt better.

"You know I lost two children between Joan and Peter, and one between Peter and Anne, Kit, so I know that denial is good for us. It taught me a great deal to relinquish the babies that I loved," Mrs. Berkley said, softly.

"Oh, what a peach, what a dear, sweet, good, good woman you are!" Kit exclaimed, ashamed that he had seemed to complain of a loss that was but a denial of his hopes.

"Surest thing you know I want to see little Anne! I'll go up, if I may? You don't think I'll be exciting and bring on fever? I wouldn't consider myself that sort. And when may she have a kitten, Mrs. Berkley? Miss Abercrombie has bought her a white Angora that gets me, and I'm sure will make it necessary to put a strait waistcoat over little Anne's gown!"

"Could anything be luckier?" Mrs. Berkley demanded of space. "Anne has begged me to get her a pet that may stay with her on the bed. She asked for a kitten, a puppy, a rabbit, or a small monkey, and she added that if I couldn't find any of these beasties she'd try to love a white mouse, though the poor little heroine, longing for a comrade, shuddered as she said it!

Her strong preference was for a kitten, an everyday kitten. I'm sure I don't know what will happen when she sees yours!"

"It's the cream of creation!" declared Kit. "But it isn't mine; it's Miss Abercrombie's. She didn't want me to say so, but of course I should." Again Joan glanced at her mother. They wondered if Helen was to solve Kit's difficulty, after all.

"You are going to lunch with us," said Mrs. Berkley, and Kit did not demur. "You shall see Anne after luncheon. You won't mind the baby? We bring her to the table, in her high chair, inherited from Anne. She pounds, but otherwise behaves with decorum."

"The baby and little Anne—but little Anne first in order, by your leave, Joan—seem to me the most desirable of comrades to-day," said Kit.

Mrs. Berkley smiled on him and patted his shoulder. "Good boy and true instinct!" she approved him.

It was a happy little luncheon party. Kit felt unaccountably soothed and heartened. The sense of loss, the jealous pang of leaving Anne to Richard, were softened. They did not talk of great things, nor brilliantly, but Mrs. Berkley and Joan talked well; their subjects were interesting, and it seemed to Kit that they judged justly and expressed themselves with temperance.

"Balanced, wise women!" Kit thought, judging in his turn.

The baby did pound, it was true, but except for a frustrated attempt on the cream, and, later, on the rosily alluring strawberries, she behaved with propriety, admitting her premise that a spoon and a drum stick were made for like purpose.

"Why not let me cut around home and get that kitten? It won't take me a half hour, and if you think little Anne's reached the kitten stage of recovery I'd love to see her with it," suggested Kit when luncheon was over and Joan offered to take him up to see little Anne.

"Won't to-morrow do, as long as she isn't told about it?" asked Joan. But seeing Kit's disappointment, she added:

"Of course, if you don't mind going, it would be dear of you to get it for her right away."

Kit ran off, racing down the street like a boy, and Mrs. Berkley went up to make sure, mother-fashion, that the carefully tended little patient was ready for a caller.

"What's up, Kit?" asked Helen as Kit assaulted the piazza where she sat.

"I'm allowed to give little Anne the kitten," Kit explained. "I came after it, told them it was your gift, Nell. Would you care to go with me?" he added as an afterthought, unwelcome, but due.

"Yes, I would," said Helen. "I won't wear a hat, I'm ready."

Kit fetched the kitten in its basket; he found that Minerva had allowed it to entwine itself around her affections and was loath to let it go. Helen and Kit took longer to cover the ground than Kit would have consumed alone. He tried to keep in mind that the kitten was due to Helen and not to regret her coming. She did not bother him with much talk, and when they reached the Berkleys' she refused to go upstairs.

"No, indeed! I'll stay here, happily, with a book and don't you hurry! Get all the fun there is out of the child's pleasure. I hope she will be pleased! I'm perfectly contented alone. Forget I'm here, but don't forget to tell me just what the little girl does! It would be horrid in me to go up; she doesn't know me," Helen said with such friendliness that the Berkleys were charmed.

Kit followed Mrs. Berkley and Joan up to little Anne's room and stood in the doorway. Little Anne was fingering paper dollies but her lack of interest in them was evident. She raised her eyes, which looked immense and as dark as night in her thin white face.

"Oh, Kit, my dear, dear, *dear* Kit! You saved me, but I loved you hard before!" she cried.

"Well, little Anne, I'm glad enough to see you to eat you up!" cried Kit, sincerely.

He lifted her in his arms and she kissed him again and again.

"You are more splendid than I remembered," little Anne sighed in profound contentment. "Doctor says I may get up in my wrapper half the day Sunday. But he says I can't go to Mass yet, but it's all right when you can't honest-truth go! And then, sooner than you'd think, I'm to be dressed! And by the Fourth you wouldn't know anything'd happened, 'cept I've got to look out and not catch cold. That's what he says. I'm grateful, Kit, that I'm going to stay right here with everyone! I know lots of people in Heaven, nicer'n anybody, but, well, don't you think you love those you know sort of closer? And I'll have to be just's good! Because I stayed here. And prob'ly I've got something to do, or I'd have died."

"Just the same, little Anne!" Kit thought, but he said:

"It's reason enough for letting you live that we all wanted you so badly, little Anne. Now, what have I here?"

"Window in the end!" cried little Anne, all excitement in an instant. "Alive? Oh, could it be a kitten, Kit?"

"It could be. It is!" said Kit.

He unstrapped the basket and took out the small white creature with the appealing face.

Little Anne fell back on her pillow, clasped her hands, and closed her eyes for an instant of intense feeling. Then she caught the kitten to her and kissed and kissed it in wordless rapture.

"Oh, God, I thank Thee for making kittens like powder puffs, and giving me one!" they heard her whisper as she held the kitten off, then clasped it to her breast, passionately.

Kit told her how Helen had brought it from the city to her, and she listened with dilated eyes.

"How wonderful! I shall love her now whether I can or not," little Anne said.

"Thank her; oh, do thank her, and tell her the way I feel about it, though no one on earth can 'magine! Would you mind if I named her Kitca, for you, dear, dear Kit? Short for Kit Carrington? 'Cause you fished me out that day and brought this angel-thing here?"

"I should be honoured, little Anne! I must go now, or you'll be tired. Good-bye, dear! Some day, when you're able to hear it, I will tell you a story about Kit Carrington, and how he sat all night watching the stars, heavy-hearted, when little Anne was so ill," he said, bending over the child to kiss her cheek.

Little Anne clasped her long, thin arms around his neck, and drew his ear to her lips, and whispered:

"You don't look well yourself, my Kit, but when I get up I'll look after you! Good-bye; and all the blessings of all the blessedest blessings be upon your rather tumbled head. 'Cause I have tumbled your hair, Kit, quite outrageous!"

Kit took Helen home feeling happier than he had thought that he could feel when the day had begun. He knew that his wound would throb again in the darkness of night, but little Anne and that peaceful household had helped him.

Behind her Helen left conflicting opinions. Mrs. Berkley was inclined to give her credit for her sweet consideration, but Joan was not sure of her. Again Helen walked with Kit in silence. She was affectionate in an unobtrusive way, like a kind sister. Kit, thinking her over as he dressed for dinner, was forced to acknowledge to himself that she could be very nice.

## CHAPTER XV

### *Opportunity*

CLEAVEDGE was a place of comfortable averages; it did not offer brilliant opportunities in any direction.

It was a pretty city, but not strikingly so; it gave many men an excellent living, but it did not afford them chances to amass great fortunes; its society, its library, its schools, its shops were all up to the average, but not beyond it.

It was understood to be the height of impropriety for Cleavedgians to doubt that their city excelled all others of its size and rank. It was an article of their faith that Cleavedge had advantages of situation and climate unequalled by any other town of some seventy thousand population in the United States.

Kit realized that he must decide upon his course in life. Temptation assailed him to let it all go. He was his aunt's heir, provided that she did not disinherit him, and at the worst, he had the small income which his mother had left him.

He did not rate himself high; there was no particular thing that he wanted to be, or to do. He knew that he could do well anything that demanded clear perception, accurate judgment, industry, fidelity; but these are characteristics universally applicable, and Kit did not recognize in himself any marked qualifications.

The loss of Anne Dallas pushed him farther into quiescence. He was surprised to find himself deeply wounded. Effort seemed less than ever worth while in a world wherein he was to be denied what fell easily to other men's share.

Still there was in Kit Carrington that essential manhood that inspires human beings to strive, though the motive for striving has not been made clear to them. He was impelled onward in the spirit that he had shown when he was a young athlete in college; the spirit that has made Kipling popular; the shibboleth of "being a man," of "standing by," "not being a quitter," though what the man is to stand by, what it is that he is not to quit, in what especial way and why he is to be a man are not formulated.

If Kit had been asked to explain, he would have answered that you must play the game and be decent; so, decent he was, and therefore he knew that he must play the game, although he did not know its rules and he had lost his first heavy stake.

He turned over in his mind the facts of his situation and made his decision. Until September he should not be able to act upon his decision; in the meantime, he lived his accustomed life, surprised to find it unfamiliar. Hitherto he had passed his days as a careless boy; he went heavily now where he had run lightly; it struck him as a curious way to find jolly Kit Carrington going about.

Helen was a comfort as the time went from May into late June. She never made demands upon him, never bothered him, but she was always ready for whatever was his mood, and he gratefully admitted that she was an all-round pal when she put her mind to it. And Helen kept in abeyance all her attraction except that clever mind. Kit had shrunk from her former emphasis of her physical charm, but mentally she was all that he could ask; he let her make him cheerful, tide him over a hard place. He rarely saw Anne Dallas. Miss Carrington had given a dinner for her and Richard Latham which was a Cleavedge event, and a hard one for Kit to bear his part in.

The dinner acted upon him as a tonic, as his aunt had foreseen that it would. The coffee that evening had much the same effect

upon Kit's grief that the final sods of a grave have on another kind of sorrow. He had buried Anne and must turn with his best ability to living.

Occasionally Helen revealed another side to Kit, a side that stirred him, dazzled him, yet repelled him. But this happened rarely, only at intervals; as if to remind him that having a pal was all very well, as far as it went, but that in the case of a beautiful girl it went but a short distance. Helen did not purpose to let him settle down to incompleteness, but for his completion she bided her time. When the time came she intended to sway him to her will.

With consummate skill she played her part. She was determined to win; she herself was surprised to see how desperately intent she was upon winning.

"Christopher Carrington," she told herself, "is just an everyday boy," yet she knew that this was not true. Kit's qualities, his simple, genuine personality, were uncommon. He was handsome, and Helen knew that his vigorous beauty was the main factor in his charm for her, yet, she told herself, there were many young men handsomer than he. As to that, as Helen knew well, there was no reasoning; Kit attracted her; it was Kit, Kit and not another, whom she wanted to marry.

It took all of her prudence, her self-control, not to defeat her own ends by forcing them too soon. She was not accustomed to dally on her road to getting whatever she wanted. She began to find her impatience mastering her, to try to set the stage for the part that she meant to play. She had no doubt whatever that she would succeed. Kit could not be blind; she had never found her beauty ineffective. He was one of those queer people who have to be aroused from slumber, but Helen believed that, once awakened, she would find Kit wide awake.

"What about walking, Nell?" Kit asked one afternoon when July was ten days old. "It's too hot to walk, but it's also too

hot not to! It makes me worse to sit around and think how uncomfortable I am! I wondered if it might not be bearable down by the river; I know a fine spot there, near where I fished out little Anne that day."

Helen outwardly hesitated; her mind instantly leaped to the suggestion.

"I'm not shod for walking," she said, extending her foot in its silly, pretty covering. "I suppose I can change. Yes, I'll go. I'll not be long Kit. I'll put on stout shoes and come right back."

Helen was as good as her word. She came cautiously down the stairs with her shoes unlaced; she knew the value of asking favours.

"You don't mind lacing them for me, Kit-the-kind, do you? It's too warm to stoop!" Helen said, and thrust out a foot as she spoke, its ribbon dragging. She had the most shapely little foot in the world; there was no reason why Kit should not like to hold it and pull the ribbons over the high-arched instep.

"Delighted, Miss Coquette!" said Kit, dropping on one knee, and Helen laughed, enjoying the thrust. "But didn't you say *stout* shoes?"

Helen surveyed the delicate kid oxford as if it were a new acquaintance.

"Of course they are stout, Kit; stout enough, at any rate," she said, and sank back apparently relieved that her shoes had not deceived her. They went down the shaded street: Miss Carrington lived on the best street in Cleavedge. But as soon as possible Kit led the way into by-paths and across fields. Cleavedge had not grown large enough to push fields far from its best section. They had been driven a long distance away from its business streets and poorer homes—where they were more needed—but it did not take long to reach them from Miss Carrington's house.

"Let's be babes-in-the-woods, Kitsy!" cried Helen, and put her hand into Kit's.

He took it cordially and they went on, swinging hands in imitation of childish ways, Helen singing softly. Her highly trained, light voice was a pleasure for its accuracy of tone and method.

Helen's pulses beat rapidly; through her quick brain rushed words that strove against her lips. She felt certain that her time had come, and for once did not stop to analyze whether it was the hour, or she herself, that was ready. Her will, her desires, were slipping their leash, and she was no longer equal to whipping them down. Yet, though they had got away from her, she was still able to follow them in silence. She ceased singing and went on, her hand clinging to Kit's, still swinging her arm with his and smiling, her lips tight, her eyes straight ahead, avoiding his because she knew what was in them.

He glanced at her two or three times, wondering what was wrong. The day was uncomfortable enough to account for anything; he remembered how small and light Helen's shoes were and charitably refrained from asking whether she was tired.

Since the day of little Anne's rescue the leafy banks of the river had grown dense with green, spreading luxuriantly from the watered roots of trees and shrubs. Midsummer blossoms, insects, and birds filled the moist, hot air with fragrance and murmurs and songs.

"It's great, isn't it, Helen?" sighed Kit, throwing himself down in the shade with a deep breath of enjoyment.

"Worth the tramp," she agreed.

She rested lightly against a tree, her hands raised and clasped behind her head, her fair hair fluttering like golden petals in the slight breeze. Suddenly she turned, threw herself on her elbow, and crept a little nearer as if drawn by the earnestness of a thought.

"Kit, it isn't too hot to talk! It's tropical enough to cast off the conventionality that ordinarily clothes our thoughts. I've wanted for weeks—forever—to get you to talk to me with the honesty no adult ever uses," she said in a low voice.

"Go ahead, Nell," said Kit, uncomfortably.

"Look here, Kit, what are you going to do? Do you realize that you are wasting opportunities? Well, then," she went on, rapidly, as Kit nodded hard; she was not ready to let him speak, "when are you going to put yourself in my father's hands? He can make you, put you right on top, Kit! Kit, dear, handsome, splendid Kit, let him do it!"

"Oh, hold on, Nell!" he protested.

He was crimson and he edged away from her.

"I don't mind telling you, but it is in confidence; Aunt Anne is not to know yet; I'm going to New York in September. A college man I knew—he was soph. in my fresh. year—took a liking to me and told me that when I wanted to seek my fortune he was ready to push it. He's inherited a big business. I am going to get a job with him in September."

"Nonsense!" cried Helen. "You'll do nothing of the sort! Aunt Anne has heaps; it's all yours, unless you displease her. Father will put you into a berth in the English, or some other first-rate embassy, and you'll go on to be minister, or something like that! And, in the meantime, travel, art, luxury, and *love*! Kit, are you a fool, or a man without eyes and blood?"

"It's good of you, Helen, to take this interest——" began Kit with difficulty.

"Kit, stop!" she whispered. "Look at me!"

He looked at her—slowly, reluctantly, and quickly again averted his eyes. She half lay upon one hip, supported by her elbow, her face turned toward him pillowed in her curved hand. She was handsomer than Kit had ever before seen her, but he did not want to look at her.

"You idiot!" Helen said, fiercely. "Are you a girl of twelve? Though I don't know one who is such an idiot! Kit, see me! I know what I am, what I can give you. Will you marry me?"

"Oh, my good Lord above us! Helen, for mercy's sake," he gasped. "Don't! It—it—it isn't funny! It's a poor joke!"

"You know as well as I do that I mean what I say," Helen said. "In these hands I hold influence, wealth, fame, every prize you can name. In this brain and beauty of mine I have all the treasures a man could desire. Humble? No. Why should I be? Vain? No! Not that, either. Sure of myself and honest; saying what you can see is true. How many in your place would turn from me? Let's talk it out, Kit. Why won't you marry me?"

"I—I—— Oh, Helen! For heaven's sake! I can't!" cried Kit, tugging at his collar.

"You *can't*!" Helen mocked him. "Ah, but you can, my dearest! Listen to reason. Your aunt wants it above all earthly things. She will be happy herself and endow you richly if you do what will pay for itself without her help. Father is a winning card; you'll hold him. You'll be playing in luck every day, with him up your sleeve. And I? Haven't I proved what I can be on the chummy tack? Haven't you had a good time with me lately, though I kept down and out of sight everything really worth while? How could you have a better travelling pal, or a hostess to back up your game in the embassy, or at Washington? And the other side of me, the lover, the wife? Oh, Kit, I'll play that part till you'll be drunk with happiness! Am I not a princess? Haven't you said so? Just look at what is here for your taking!" Kit was compelled to meet her eyes. He stared at her and stood transfixed.

"Ah, Kit!" Helen purred. "Why can't you marry me?—*can't*, forsooth! I haven't told you that I love you, but I do! I want you, Kit, and no one else, though I can have any one

else on call. Are you imagining yourself in love with the girl Latham has chosen? Nonsense, Kit! That was the stirring of fancy, not love! What could make you forget that surface scratch like real love, love for me, *me*, your wife? When you learn what love is, as I will teach you, Kit, how absurd all trifles will seem! Keep your eyes on mine, Kit, you young sun god, and then tell me, if you can, why you will not marry me? Are you afraid of love, Kit, as a girl is afraid? But not I, oh, not I! I'm not afraid to take what I want, what wants me! Tell me, now as you stand looking at me, why you who are strong, and young, and free, and able to love, would throw away this Helen who will not let you go! Who will *not*!" Kit had retreated farther, but he could not take his eyes from Helen.

There was left in him no power to think; only to feel.

Helen had thrown herself against a tree; she was looking up at him, her eyes like glowing coals, feline, compelling. Her face was white, her lips parted by her quick breathing. She was irresistible, yet as Kit's will swayed to her, he blindly struggled against her.

There was in him no sense of attraction nor of repulsion; all the ages which had preceded him fought on Helen's side, drew the youth to the woman. Yet in Kit's veins some beautiful inheritance from sweet, patient, chastened women, as well as the ideal which he had formed, and to which he could not then consciously revert, stood him in good stead. He bent toward Helen and she lifted her arms to him. Then he stepped backward, and muttered hoarsely:

"Helen, help me! You are mad!"

"I'll help you, Kit! Oh, Kit, it's for your dear sake, as well as for my own that I want you! I swear this is true. But how I do want you, want you, want you, *want* you!"

She went over to him and knelt, laying her glorious head at his feet.

"Say you'll marry me, Kit. You'll be happier than you can dream. It is for your sake, too. See, I'm at your feet, Kit; take me! Helen is at your feet! And she will make you endlessly happy, dearest!"

Kit's will, his judgment, his hold on his own identity seemed to crumble and fall into nothingness. He stood for an instant with closed eyes, suffering, he did not know what. He knew that he would raise Helen in his arms in spite of himself. He knew that he must not raise her, for, if he touched her, that identity for which he groped would be forever lost. She waited at his feet, knowing that in a moment he would lift her from her self-abasement and then, in his arms, she would kiss him, and that Kit would marry her. It was but an instant of time, but it measured an eternity.

A piping voice came singing behind the trees, a child's voice, slight and not as lovely as a guardian angel's, but it broke the spell as effectually as St. Michael the archangel's could have done:

*"Astre propice au marin,  
Conduis ma barque au rivage;  
Préserve-moi du naufrage,  
Blanche Étoile du Matin.  
Lorsque les flots en courroux  
Viendront menacer ma tête,  
Calme, calme la tempête,  
Rends pour moi le ciel plus doux."*

it sang, not inappropriately, Kit thought, listening intently. He felt weak and dizzy from the sudden relaxation of the strain which he had borne. Little Anne appeared from among the trees. In her hand she held jewel weed, wilted from her hot little palm, but valiantly bright-coloured as it drooped.

"Why, Kit, dear Kit!" cried little Anne in the glow of sur-

prised delight. "I had no idea you'd be here when I came! And Miss Abercrombie, my kind Angora Kitca friend! What you doing down in the grass, Miss Abercrombie?"

"Looking for four-leaf clovers for luck," said Helen so savagely that little Anne fell back a step and looked up inquiringly at Kit.

Kit managed a smile that sufficed for little Anne, though it added to her bewilderment, it was so unlike his usual bright friendliness.

Little Anne was a lady with innate social instincts; here was something oppressive, not understandable, hence she must, obviously, arise to the occasion.

"I was singing French, Kit," she said. "I haven't known how so very long. Could you understand what it was? Is my pronunciation pretty fair? That's what Sister said it was. That's a hymn to the Blessed Virgin. Mr. Latham taught me it. He heard it over in France; fishermen sing it, so do their children when they are at sea, sing it for their fathers, you know. Mr. Latham just said the words at first; I didn't know what they meant. But afterward he took it to pieces and showed me every sybable, so I'd know exactly what I sang, and I do. Don't you think it's very remarkably nice?"

Little Anne had talked on, her bright eyes roving from one to the other of her perturbed adult hearers. She felt that there was a gap for her to fill, a strange disturbance for her to cover, though it eluded her curiosity. But no one, be she ever so tactful, could be expected to talk on forever, and at last little Anne paused for a reply.

"I think, little Anne, that it is indeed remarkably nice," agreed Kit. "It was also remarkably nice of Mr. Latham to dissect it and to teach you the meaning of each separate sybable! Are you alone, little Anne? Will you go home with—" Kit hesitated—"Miss Abercrombie and me?"

"I am alone," said little Anne with dignity. "My mother knew I was going walking and she knew it was safe. But I'd love to go back with you. Why did you come, Kit? Looking for me doing penance again?"

"No. Mr. Carrington came here to do penance himself, à la St. Antony, and he has done it," Helen said, and laughed; the laugh frightened little Anne. "Mr. Carrington has done penance, but he has also inflicted it upon another, which must be a joy to him. You don't read the Bible in your Church, I'm told. If you did you would read with profit the story of Joseph. He was a righteous youth, also. I've no doubt he enjoyed Mrs. Potiphar's discomfort, as a righteous person would. She deserved what she got. Wait till I screw up my hair, Kit. It's hard on hair to practise the virtue of humility."

Helen let down the masses of pure gold which crowned her. They fell around her like a veil, and till she twisted them into her hand and began to wind her hair around her head, it hid her from sight.

Little Anne cried out ecstatically:

"Oh, oh-ee! It's like Jenny Wren, the dolls' dressmaker! Mother read me that out of a grown-up book that Dickens wrote. But we read the Bible a lot, Miss Abercrombie; that's not—I mean that's a mistake. It's a golden bower, like Jenny Wren's. Aren't you the beautifulest, Miss Abercrombie! I think Kitca takes after you; she's the most beautifulest of all the kittens that ever could be 'maged, and all my life I shall bless you for her."

Helen threw back her head, her hair in place. Tears of rage and defeat were on her lashes. Her lips were grim and her pallor had given way to crimson in her cheeks. She was intelligent enough to know that she was defeated. Never again would she have Kit in her power. Since he had escaped her when she would have sealed him beyond the possibility of

honourable escape, he was lost to her. Calm reflections upon this afternoon's scene would put him beyond her grasp.

She looked malignantly at little Anne.

"What do they put on pincushions for innocents yet-to-be, or rather used to do it in the good old days? 'Bless the Babe?' David Copperfield had that on his prenatal pincushion. I shall work one for Anne Berkley, but there will be the difference of a word in the sentiment," Helen said.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Abercrombie, but Kitca is enough and too much for you to do for me!" cried little Anne, fervently. "May I put in one of your hairpins? It is rather out."

"Miss Abercrombie would rather put it in herself, Anne," said Kit, hastily. He took the child on his back. "Let me ride you home, or part of the way."

And avoid contamination," smiled Helen, interpreting Kit's unconsidered impulse.

At Miss Carrington's, Helen went into the house, but Kit went all the way to the Berkley house, seeing little Anne home.

Helen turned back from the foot of Miss Carrington's steps.

"Kit," she called after the pair of friends, "I've had a lovely time; I'm fond of the drama. And I think you are right, and I was wrong. I wouldn't change it; I wanted to see, and I saw! Good-bye. Little Anne likes a snowy-white kit, but not I! You're a nice boy, Kit, but you're not much of a man."

She ran laughing up the rest of the way and rushed into the house.

"She seems mad," observed sharp little Anne.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Revelation*

**Y**OUR daughter has not been rescued this time, Mrs. Berkley; I am merely her favoured cavalier," explained Kit, delivering little Anne into her mother's hands.

"Thank you, Kit." Mrs. Berkley spoke with difficulty for little Anne had her around the neck in a hug that implied a long separation. "Mr. Berkley is on the side piazza with Peter, and Antony is here. Joan has taken the baby and left him. Why don't you join them there?"

"I always knew it would come to a separation between Joan and Antony," said Kit, gratefully accepting a respite from returning home.

"And you knew it would be only for the length of a day and night, didn't you?"

Mrs. Berkley looked sharply at Kit's perturbed face. "Come, Anne; you must be made presentable for dinner. Stay to dinner with us, please, Kit."

"I can't be made presentable," he said, glancing at his tramping clothes, and betraying his desire to stay.

"That doesn't matter; we are alone. Anne has obligations. One is that her clothes are here; yours aren't! Stay, Kit, dear, won't you?" Mrs. Berkley urged him.

"Gratefully," said Kit, "if you'll put up with me. I think I may go away to-morrow."

"Yes? For long?" asked Mrs. Berkley. Her eyes and her wits were working fast; Kit looked badly perturbed.

"I don't know, Mrs. Berkley. It all depends; I may not go," Kit said.

"Depends on Helen Abercrombie's going," Mrs. Berkley supplemented him in her thoughts. "She appeared well here, but Joan didn't like her, and I couldn't help seeing that she meant to marry this boy."

"Then you must surely stay to dinner; tramping clothes are all right when they are not what might be called worn in malice! We like you better than evening garments, Kit. Come, Anne!" she said aloud.

Upstairs with little Anne, Mrs. Berkley had difficulty in restraining the questions that she wanted to ask. She made it a rule not to encourage Anne in comments on her elders, to which her precocity and ever-ready interest inclined her, but now her mother cast about in her mind for ways to get Anne's story without her knowing it.

To her relief, little Anne, emerging from the bathroom, rubbing her thin arms dry with a rotary motion from shoulder to wrist, asked:

"Why should Kit hate to have Miss Abercrombie hunt for four-leafed clovers?"

"Does he?" asked her mother.

"She was kneeling, hunting them, and he looked awful. I thought he was sick. She was almost on his shoes, Mother! I was singing, but I saw him look sick before he heard me. Then he looked for what was singing. Do you suppose he thought 'twas a brownie? Brownies couldn't sing hymns. Fairies don't either, do they? I was singing a hymn, that French one. Kit said it was nice. Miss Abercrombie said she was hunting for four-leafed clovers. You'd suppose they wouldn't be so near Kit's feet. And she didn't have any. Kit didn't want her to hunt 'em, I'm most sure. I couldn't tell whether he was mad or what. But she got mad, very mad, indeed!

She said I ought to read the Bible about Joseph. Did she mean St. Joseph, Mother? He's in the Bible, isn't he? 'Course! All about the angel and his dream! Well, I don't see why they were so queer. She said something about a lady—Mrs. Pot-far—or for—or something, how she got what she deserved. I'm 'fraid I don't know hist'ry very well, Mother. Is that hist'ry?"

"Why, yes. It is ancient and modern history, Anne," said Mrs. Berkley. She had learned more than she had the least desire to know, and without a word on her part.

"Shall we put on the straight linen frock, with the little leather belt? I think so. And perhaps it would be as well not to speak of four-leafed clovers, perhaps not of meeting Kit, nor of your hymn. If he was annoyed, though we don't know that he was, we should not care to remind him of it and spoil his appetite for our rather nice dinner! Raspberry shortcake and raspberry ice, little Anne!"

"Kit can't be coming in to dinner, Helen," said Miss Carrington, pausing at her guest's chamber door on her way downstairs.

Helen had been thinking hard since she had left Kit. Anger still blazed in her eyes and flamed in her cheeks, but she had decided upon her line of action. However frank she might have been in prearranging her course, now that it had failed, her candour should be curtailed. She would not admit to Miss Carrington how completely she had missed her aim. She knew perfectly well that Kit's aunt would condemn her, not only because she retained the manners of a past generation, but because she would feel that Helen would inevitably have repelled Kit by what she had done. Helen would not admit this. If little Anne had not come along precisely when she came; if Kit had once taken her in his arms, Helen felt sure that she would have fastened herself within them for all his life.

"Oh, didn't Kit come back?" asked Helen, indifferently, when Miss Carrington said that she thought he was not returning to dinner. "He took home that thin little dark marplot. She came wandering where we were sitting. Kit left me here and went home with her. How common youngsters do go about without being looked after, and nothing happens to them! Kit probably went with this scrawny little beast for pleasure. He has strange tastes and ways!" Helen's fury escaped her.

Miss Carrington clutched the back of the chair by the door and stared at her.

"What under heaven do you mean, Helen?" she gasped. "Little dark *marplot*? Anne Berkley? Good heavens, was she a marplot? Did she spoil anything?"

"Only all our plans, Miss Carrington," Helen said, turning from the mirror with a laugh that was not pleasant. "I had Kit where I wanted him; a moment more and I'd have been your niece. But it was against his will. I'd have changed his will; he was past choosing. Then that brat came singing through the trees, a fool French hymn like a shepherdess in a badly cast musical comedy, and——" Helen waved her hands to signify the dispersion of everything.

Miss Carrington rallied.

"But it's not final. If he was entranced, as you imply, it is only deferred."

"Not at all," cried Helen. "Kit had resisted my arguments in favour of our sensible marriage. He doesn't approve in the least of Christopher Carrington and Helen Abercrombie compounding the felony of sacrilege—or some such fool notion. And now he'll be on his guard against my attraction. Frankly, never-to-be aunt, I won't bother any more with Kit. I don't want him; he's a fool, a milk-white milk-sop! I'll marry George Lanbury soon. He has money enough to buy up the whole of Cleavedge, and when it comes to appreciating my

beauty——” Helen again ended with a gesture, this time conveying boundlessness. “I hope that Kit will wait for that child to grow up, and that he will marry her and have a string of black imps as long as the rosary he’ll be forced to rattle off at Roman shrines, decked out in tinsel!” Helen bit her lip, angry that at the last moment she had fully betrayed the fury that is renowned as exceeding anything known in hell.

Miss Carrington meekly followed Helen downstairs. She was angry with Kit, but had not given up hope. She also felt a malicious satisfaction in Helen’s rage; it somewhat compensated her baffled ambition for the boy, if it were finally baffled, that he could scorn and infuriate such a woman as Helen Abercrombie. She still wanted Helen to be Kit’s wife, but what fun it was to see her gnashing her teeth in desire for him! Miss Carrington thirsted for entertainment; it was entertaining to see the humiliation of a woman who held every advantage over her own years and withered face.

They dined with but little talk between them, slowly, and Helen regained her self-control at the orderly, well-served table, by the help of the food and wine that she needed.

“I’ll spare Kit’s blushes to-night, Miss Carrington,” Helen said, laughing, as she put an arm around the old lady and went with her into the drawing room. “I will go to my room before he comes in. And then, if you please, I’ll leave you in a day or two. I think I’ll go down to the sea, I and none other, and let Mr. Lanbury come there to see me.”

“You will do nothing of the kind, Helen Abercrombie! You will stay with me. Your father is coming here if you remain. Why should I lose my pleasure because of my foolish nephew? For that matter, have this Lanbury here later, if Kit doesn’t come to his senses. Though something tells me, your manner I suppose, that I shall not like him. Helen, I beg of you not to go away! Don’t you know that I should miss you, my

handsome girl? I am not feeling well lately. Stay!" begged Miss Carrington.

"Better see a doctor," said Helen, carelessly. "Well, we'll consider my staying, but the seashore is livelier."

Helen went to her room. Now that the motive for taking pains was gone, she took no trouble to entertain Miss Carrington. She was rather pleased to be free of the duty; she did not find Kit's aunt nearly as interesting and up-to-date as that lady considered herself.

When Kit came in and upstairs, he found his aunt's door ajar and she waiting for him in kimono and slippers on its sill.

"Here, Kit!" she whispered, motioning to him and opening her door wider. "One word with you!"

His heart sank. He had spent a pleasant evening talking with Mr. Berkley and Antony, and had enjoyed Peter the Second's exposition of a plan he had for making an improved ski, a timely subject for a warm evening.

Kit had been diverted from his discomfort and the puzzle as to his next step, but it had closed down upon him on the way home, and he knew that it was now to become articulate in the person of his aunt. He went into Miss Carrington's room: she followed and closed the door behind them.

"Kit, what have you done to Helen?" Miss Carrington demanded.

"Nothing, Aunt Anne; I've done nothing to Helen," Kit replied, hoping that he did not look as much like a small boy called to the teacher's desk as he felt.

Miss Carrington chuckled; her sense of humour was unreliable.

"I believe that. Not even kissed her!" she said. "But I meant you to kiss her and be engaged to her, then marry her, in a pretty and prudent sequence, as you perfectly well know." She suddenly became fiercely serious. "See here, Kit, you're to marry Helen, do you hear me? I wonder what

better you could ask of fate? That quiet little brown girl, Anne Damask, Darrar, whatever she is, with whom you fancied yourself in love—oh, dear me, yes; I saw it, but it was utter tom-foolishness—is going to marry the poet. A good thing all around! You are to marry Helen. Please make a point of being engaged to her to-morrow at this time."

It was a mistake, of course, but Kit laughed.

"Sounds like ordering the car, or chops, or something, Aunt Anne!" he said, his cheerfulness restored. "I shall never marry Helen, and never make a point of being engaged to her; I'll make a point of not being! And to-morrow I'll get out of her way; go down to New York to see a man there whom I want to see anyway, and then hang around somewhere till Helen is gone. In September I'm going into business."

"Good heavens, Kit!" gasped Miss Carrington. "And my heart has been weak lately!"

She yielded everything so swiftly that Kit was bewildered.

"Very well, then, don't marry Helen! It will be you, not I, who loses. But don't go away. Stay at home. There won't be awkwardness; Helen knows how to break most of the commandments, but she wouldn't know how to behave stupidly. Stay here, Kit, at least awhile."

"Poor auntie! I am a trial, I know. But you wouldn't have me be a regular bounder and marry Helen for her father, now would you? Don't answer; it's bad enough not to be able to handle me without granting I'm right! I'll stay on—if I can! Honest, Aunt Anne, I'm not sure I can," Kit said.

"Certainly, you can; nonsense! Good-night, Kit! I'll try to be grateful for the concession that keeps you under my roof," said Miss Carrington, letting him out softly, as if she wanted to let sleeping dogs lie, and their kennels were near at hand.

Miss Carrington had reckoned, if not without her host, yet without her guest. Helen had been in the cupola star-gazing,

or so it appeared. She came down the narrow stairs which led to the cupola of this house, built after the manner of ambitious houses erected immediately after the Civil War. She encountered Kit in the hall.

"Hallo, Kit!" she said, softly, lest Miss Carrington should hear, but in such an off-hand, nothing-happened manner that Kit had a fleeting wonderment whether he had been in bed and dreamed the afternoon's adventure.

"Come in here." Helen opened the door to her room and drew Kit inside. "No more occupied chambers, thank goodness, except the servants', and I'm not going up there!" Kit thought, with a desperate sense upon him of an endless chain of bedroom interviews, and no small dread of this one.

"Nice little Kit-boy," Helen began, carelessly. "I want to tell you, for your own sake, because I know you're unsophisticated enough to worry over it, that this afternoon I was trying out a wager I had with myself. I won it, you'll be pleased to hear; the real me! I was straight about asking you to fix up a marriage with me. I truly think, or rather I did think so then, that it would be a good, sensible, rather all-around nice arrangement. I don't think so now, Kit, my dear! You were right and I wrong. I'm not your sort, and, please don't mind one last bit of frankness: I'd simply die of you as steady diet! I'm like Becky Sharp: I don't like bread and butter! But the rest of the racket was—what do you boys call it, chucking a bluff?—was chucking a bluff. I *thought* your decency was the real thing, but it is a foible of mine to study people, preferably on pins, like grubs. I don't mind what I do with you, so I put you on a pin, and mighty well did you wriggle, true to the compass. Though I couldn't be sure you wouldn't have kissed me if that nas—nice little girl hadn't happened along! I'm not really a vamp, you know, Kits! It was a mean trick for your old chum to play on you, but you came out fine; a bit

crude, not too clever, but a mighty nice kid, just as you always were! So don't let any constraint creep in, Kit! It was a game and you won it—and so did I! I wanted to get this said before you slept; it's an error to allow embarrassment to develop at breakfast; fearfully hard to get rid of it in daylight! Shake hands, Kit. I won't squeeze yours! Only please tell me I did it well! I have every kind of vanity, but I'm especially vain of my acting!"

Kit conquered his natural impulse to speak the truth, to set straight anything distantly resembling a misstatement.

"You've got Bernhardt and them all beaten a mile, Helen," he said. "Upon my honour, till you told me, I thought it wasn't acting! Well as I'd known you, for so long, too, you fooled me! Go on the boards, Helen; it was great! But a trifle exhausting. I'm sleepy. Aren't you? You've earned the right to rest. Good-night, Siddons-Rachel-Bernhardt! Good-night, Helen of Troy, whose face lighted fires enough, and still does!"

Kit left the room quickly. Helen went over to her mirror studying, yet hardly consciously seeing her face, now hard and not beautiful.

"Well, at least I've helped him to act like a man! He accepted the lie quite decently, played up better than I thought he would. It's bye-bye, Kit! He's still to be coveted. If I were sentimental, I'd say I was in love with him, but, since I'm not sentimental, I'll say, instead, that I'm going to marry St. George—also his dragon—and be ridiculously rich and handsome and haughty."

Helen turned off the light to undress in the dark; she did not like to see herself in the mirror just then.

Kit had promised to bring a book from his boyhood's library, containing illustrations of Canadian winter sports, to young Peter Barkley on the following day.

He found Anne Dallas there, in the deep window seat with

little Anne. The smoothly coiled masses of dark hair bent over the bobbed, bright ribbon-tied darker hair, as the grown-up Anne fitted a worldly pink dancing gown on the little Anne's big doll whose serious-minded name was Scholastica.

Kitca, larger and apparently whiter, sat on Anne Dallas's shoulder, her round Christmas-card face set off by a complex blue satin ribbon bow that formed its background from ear to ear. It was a pretty picture, Kit thought, as he stood for an instant before he was discovered, looking at it.

He had so completely given up Anne, even excluding thoughts of her as honour compelled, that he looked at her quietly with a slight tightening around his heart, a little quickening of his breath—but not with the perturbation which the sight of her had aroused when he was free to allow himself to go out to her. Anne's smile was sweetly friendly, her eyes unclouded as she looked up and greeted him.

"Are you still in Cleavedge?" she asked. "Mr. Latham was wondering the other day. Are you well? You look tired."

Kit blushed. He had not slept well; he could not bear to recall Helen in this maidenly presence.

"I'm all right, thanks: perhaps a little sleepy. I'm going to see Mr. Latham soon. How about the play?" Kit asked.

"He has done a great deal of the fourth act; almost all of it. There is a famous manager coming to lunch with Mr. Latham, so I ran away. I don't want to meet him, and Mr. Latham admitted that I couldn't talk to him," Anne laughed, and Kit joined her, thinking this were likely to be true.

"Will you take this book to Peter, little Anne?" Kit asked. "Tell him I've marked the pages."

Little Anne sped away with the book and Kit still stood by the table, fluttering magazine pages, while Anne still sat in the deep window seat, fondling Kitca.

There was nothing to explain it, but with the going of little

Anne something had come. There was between Anne and Kit constraint, unforeseen, oppressive. Nothing like it had happened before; each was conscious of it now, each wondered at it, was powerless against it. They had not been alone together since Anne had promised to marry Richard. Now they did not look at each other; for a while they could not. Then Kit raised his eyes and met Anne's, dilated, marvelling, suffused with light, fixed on his. They gazed at each other utterly unconscious of everything, mastered by a feeling that burned in the blue and the brown eyes, mutually calling and answering.

"Anne, I love you! I love you! And you love me!" Kit did not know that he spoke till the words were uttered, never to be unsaid.

Anne did not speak, except with her eyes, and they were illumined.

"Anne, think of it! You love me! I love you!" repeated Kit, and crossed to her.

Then Anne recovered sufficiently to remember. She clasped her throat with both hands and fear drove the light from her eyes.

"No, no, no! Richard!" she whispered.

Little Anne came back, but she stopped short in the doorway, not understanding what she saw, but enthralled by it. Neither Anne nor Kit knew that she was there.

"Richard— can't be helped!" said Kit, fiercely. "How did we know this? You don't love him; you love me! You didn't know that; neither did I. I knew that I loved you, but—well, yes! Once I did feel sure that you loved me, but when you were going to marry Richard Latham I gave in, thought I was mistaken. Now you are mine, Anne, Anne!"

"No, Kit, never," Anne checked him with a gesture. "Would you blight Richard's life? We did not know this awful thing——"

"Stop!" Kit cried. "You shall not speak so of it! It is a heavenly, a blessed thing! Out of pity for a blind man, not

knowing yourself, you promised to marry him. Do you think that counts against *this*? Would you go on with it, marry a man whom you do not love, when you love another man? A crime! No less! I myself will go to Latham and tell him exactly what has happened. Are we to blame? Did we know this glorious love would leap out of us, leap from one to the other as we looked at each other? When our lips were silent it tore its way out through our eyes. It is a miracle, tremendous, no more guilty than the river hewing its way through the rock of the Grand Cañon! I'll tell Latham exactly what has happened to us when we were lying quietly upon the knees of the gods. He'll see it; Latham's a great man; no one knows that better than I!"

"Thank you, Kit Carrington, for your praise of my future husband," said Anne, tremulous, but fighting for self-control. "You will never tell him these things. When you've had time to consider you will know that this is false, specious reasoning and cowardly. Neither of us will do anything selfish or dishonourable. I shall keep my word, Kit, and you will help me keep it. At any cost we will guard our honour. If Richard were another man—— But even then, how could we? But he being what he is, and I being to him what I am—ah, no! He loves me, heaven knows, but it is not that most. Kit, be true and fine as Richard is, and help me, for indeed this is cruelly hard! On my honour, I'd no idea you cared for me, nor did I know that I loved you as I do, oh, as I do!"

"Say that again, Anne!" Kit implored her, mercilessly. "At least let me hear it again and yet again! And don't think this is hard only for you. Kiss me, sweet, and tell me how you love me. Your eyes said it first! You're not any man's wife. You shall be mine!"

"No, Kit." Anne put both her hands, palms outward, between her face and Kit. "I am not free, but bound. Richard trusts me, he has my word; he may trust me!"

Her deep, quivering voice broke and shrilled. She had reached the end of her endurance.

"Go away from me, Kit Carrington, go away! I will never again tell you how I love you, I love you, oh, how I love you! Shame to make me weak! Horrible, horrible! Richard, come, come, dear, kind, tender Richard! Kit is cruel to me. Anne, little Anne, come back quick!"

Little Anne had obeyed an instinct that sent her, frightened and white, mystified, yet understanding much, away from the door after she had heard and seen almost all that had passed, but before the actors in the scene discovered her.

Now, when Anne called, she came hastily, young as she was, proving her ability to play a part, saying as she came:

"Yes, Miss Anne, dear, did you want me?"

But little Anne was not equal to the demand made upon her by Anne's hysterical weeping. She threw her thin arms around the girl, and drew her head down into the hollow of her very hollow shoulder; mothering her and patting her.

"I'm sure I don't see how you can bother her, Kit, for you are always so very dear, but I do certainly think you'd better run right away! It'll make her sick to cry so. Just go right home, dear Kit, and you'd better say a prayer to St. Joseph, 'cause he's the one for husbands. There, there, my poor darling, please try to feel better! Don't cry! I know it'll come all right. See how I didn't die when I was so sick; often things turn out better'n you'd think! Anne, little Anne, will take care of you. Good-bye, dear Kit. I'm sorry, but Mother's out, and I truly think you'd better go home, just this one time!" she said, coaxing both of her patients purringly.

"Oh, little Anne, little Anne, I used to be little Anne, too! Don't grow up, child!" sobbed Anne, not lifting her head as Kit went slowly out of the room.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *Honour*

LITTLE Anne expected Anne to recover after a reasonable time. She had never known a grown person to cry so violently. She had dealt with no abandon of emotion except her own, and after she had cried tempestuously she was always done with it. But Anne's weeping abated only to begin all over again when little Anne began to hope; despair of its ever ending seized her. Her arm ached, too, but Anne remembered that it would and withdrew from it to lie face downward in the window cushions, which relaxed the muscles of little Anne's strained body, but tautened the cords of her heart.

"Please, please, please, dear!" little Anne repeated constantly, patting Anne's shoulder steadily, changing hands that the action in which she had undefined confidence might not cease.

Then little Anne, getting desperate, bent over Anne.

"Wouldn't you like to see somebody?" she anxiously suggested. "Shall I call the doctor, or someone?"

"I think it's a priest I need, Anne; I'd like to go to confession!" she sobbed.

Little Anne was not only relieved by this first coherent speech from her patient, but she hailed the suggestion as the most fitting thing.

"Sure you can go!" she cried. "But I guess you'd better go to the church. They're not just exactly hearing now, I s'pose, but there's a bell and you ring it and one of 'em comes right out. If you get a chance to choose you'd better go to Father Denny;

he's mine. He's kind of old, not very old, but his hair's gray, but he's as nice! I'll take you, Miss Anne." To little Anne's inexpressible relief Anne laughed, a sorry sound of merriment, but a stride from passionate crying.

"You dear, funny little enthusiast! I don't go to confession, I'm not a Catholic, though 'almost thou persuadest me' to be one! I can see why confession would help. I'd like wise, dispassionate guidance now. Suppose you call Joan, since your mother is out? Ask Joan if she's too busy to come here and let me talk to her?"

Anne sat erect and dried her eyes. Little Anne ran rejoicing to the telephone; she knew the symptoms of recovery.

She was back in a few moments, short of breath, but beaming.

"Came near missing her! But it wouldn't have mattered; she was coming with the baby. She'll be here quick; going to stop at the grocer's, she said, but that's all," little Anne announced.

Little Anne found the interval of waiting for Joan a strain. It was hard to make conversation after such a scene, and with her active brain teeming with curiosity. She was quick to perceive that Anne preferred silence, so little Anne sat mute, hard though it was on her.

Joan arrived full of sympathy; she knew no more than what little Anne had told her, that Anne was crying dreadfully. As Barbara's mother she felt adequate to cope with any problem, console any grief, though for the latter office she would have nominated her baby as better able to fill it than herself.

"Suppose we go up to Mother's room, dear," Joan proposed. "It's the nicest room in the house; its walls are soaked with her wisdom and love for us. I think Barbara will walk soon; only fancy! We'll take her with us; she's darling when you feel blue! Anne, will you ask Peter to get the baby carriage up on the

piazza, dear? Anne, Anne Dallas, what has happened? You look killed!"

"Yes," assented Anne, wearily. Then she remembered how good to her little Anne had been.

"Don't mind our leaving you awhile, will you, dear?" she said to the child. "I've got to tell Joan a secret that isn't my own alone. You've been a dear little soul, such a comfort! I'd love to tell it to you if only you were as old as Joan."

"I don't mind," said little Anne without the slightest indication that she already knew as much about it as she could understand, and that was all the facts of the case, though not their consequences.

"I think I'll stay with Peter after I tell him about the carriage. He's out in the backyard, working. He likes me there; he didn't use to want me chattering, he said. I think Peter will prob'ly be a priest. He's so good to me since I was sick that I'm 'most sure he's got a vocation."

Little Anne betook herself to the backyard, where she found Peter as she had expected. She helped him with the front wheels of Barbara's carriage, lifting it up on the piazza, and then returned with him to sit in her favourite attitude, elbows on knees, hands supporting her elfin chin, watching him work. But even to Peter, absorbed though he was, her interest in skis was plainly distracted.

"Would you like a pair, Anne?" he asked. "You see I'm trying to fix up a sort of steering gear, rudder-like attachment. Do you suppose you could use skis without going on your nose?"

"Could I!" exclaimed Anne, scornfully. "Funny if I couldn't. There isn't much boys can do I can't. And those things are only 'cause I'm rather small. When I'm as old as you I'll do every single thing you do, just's well you do 'em."

"That's no idle dream, either, Anne," agreed Peter, admiringly. "I'd back you for a Marathon."

"Well, that's nice of you, Peter," Anne said with a deep, in-drawn breath, as gratified as if she knew what a Marathon was. "Peter, I'm cast down and 'flicted in my mind."

"Gee!" exclaimed Peter, stopping short to look at little Anne. "That's going some, even for you, Miss Berkley! What's tuned you up on the Lamentations?"

"The Lamentations in Tenebræ; I guess I know that!" little Anne rebuked him. "It isn't Holy Week in July! Peter, is it perfec'tly awful to love someone and not be going to marry that one, but another who is truly glorious?"

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" cried Peter, sincerely shocked. "Anne, for the love of Mike! Mother doesn't let you go to movies, and you don't read novels, as far as we know. Would you mind telling me what under the canopy started you on that?"

"Yes, Peter, I would," said little Anne with melancholy dignity. "It's not my secret alone; if 'twas my secret alone I wouldn't mind telling you. I just asked."

Peter lacked the clue to this quotation from Anne Dallas which little Anne had adopted on hearing it. She had treasured it up to use on Monica the next time that her most intimate friend wanted to be told a secret, but it came in so admirably now that she tried it first on Peter; these bits of beautiful diction fortunately serve more than once.

It had such an effect upon Peter that little Anne esteemed it more highly than before.

"Anne," he declared, solemnly, "I'll be darned! I certainly will be darned! Of all the kids! I hope Mother knows what to make of you!"

"Oh, she does! But you didn't tell me, Peter-two," little Anne reminded her anxious brother.

"No, and I'm not going to," said Peter. "You put your problem-play plots up to Mother, or Father, or Father Denny, or

someone; I shall not talk to you about such things! Great Scott, what shall we do with you when you're in your 'teens?"

"You needn't act's if I was wicked; it's not a sin, Peter-two! And when I'm in my 'teens I'll prob'ly be a Carmelite. The Little Flower went when she was fifteen, and I'll be eight in October."

"Well, thank goodness, here comes Mother! You certainly have got on a string to-day, Miss Berkley!" sighed Peter.

Little Anne rushed to meet her. Though she had been talking calmly to Peter, at the sight of her mother all her excitement boiled up again. She threw her arms around Mrs. Berkley's waist and began to talk as fast as she could.

"Mother, my dearest, there's something dreadful upstairs!" Mrs. Berkley dropped into a chair.

"Anne! What?" she gasped.

"It's Anne. Not the old Anne, the middle-aged Anne—no, she isn't, she's young, but——"

"Miss Dallas," suggested her mother, patiently striving to make little Anne realize that all her friends were not at the Christian-name age of equality with her.

Anne nodded. "She's cried and cried! I really didn't know what to do about it! We had what to do when people faint; in school, you know, but she didn't faint. Kit was here and they got to telling each other how they loved——"

"Anne! Anne, my dear child!" protested Mrs. Berkley.

"Mother, it's the truth and nothing else! Isn't it fearful?" Little Anne had not been sure how to regard what had happened till she derived from her mother's horrified face a sense that it was shocking.

"Kit wanted her just to kiss him quick, but Anne wouldn't. She kept saying she didn't know a thing about it before, and 'no, no, no,' and 'Richard!' She told him to think of Richard

—that's Mr. Latham, Mother—and how splendid he is, and how well he likes Anne. And Kit said it was more 'portant about the way they loved each other than Mr. Latham, but Anne wouldn't stand for it 'tall. She kind of got going, you know, Mother! Her nice soft voice that sounds like a sealskin muff got real high and funny, sort of splitted. And she cried awful! Right on my shoulder, Mother! And I told Kit he'd better run along for now, because he made her feel upset, *badly* upset! So he went. And I telephoned Joan, not till she'd cried till I thought she'd die, and now she's upstairs with Joan, telling her and asking her what she thinks. She didn't know I knew all about it, Mother; please don't tell her; she might rather not," wise little Anne ended her story.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Berkley. "What a misfortune! If only Mr. Latham weren't all that he is, or Kit so nice! What shall we do?"

"If you ask me, Mother," said little Anne. "I'd let me take Anne up a cup of tea."

Mrs. Berkley looked at her small daughter blankly, her mind so fixed on the insoluble problem given for solution to three people who were dear to her, that she could not quickly shift it to immediate necessities. Then she caught little Anne into her arms and kissed her.

"Small feminine Mr. Dick, who sets us all right!" she cried. "I've no doubt that poor Anne Dallas has the postlude headache. Run and ask Bibiana to make a small pot of her brightest tea and take it on a tray, with a plate of biscuits, to—where are they, Anne?"

"In your room. Make them come down, Mother, 'cause Babs will be so tired staying up there if she isn't asleep," said Anne.

"Another good suggestion, my dear! Better break up the talk; they've said all that can be said—which is nothing! Ask

Bibiana for the tray in the library and I'll fetch the girls." Mrs. Berkley arose and went upstairs.

Mrs. Berkley was hailed as a deliverer by Joan and Anne. Rapidly Anne poured out her tale which varied little from the version which Mrs. Berkley had already heard from little Anne; she did not betray that it was not new to her.

"And no matter what pain it entails, I must keep my word, Mrs. Berkley. Don't you see it so? Especially when my word is given to Richard Latham, of all the world?" Anne ended.

"And I say, Mother, that Anne can't imagine what it would mean to her to be married to a man, even to such a man as Richard Latham, when she loved another," Joan took up the burden, shuddering as she spoke. "Isn't it a sin, Mother? Do you think it right? Oh, I know that there are honour, pity, all sorts of arguments in the other column, but when all is said, how can Anne marry Richard, loving Kit?"

Joan's vision was unmistakably fixed upon herself married to someone else with Antony Paul in the world.

"It would not be a sin, Joan, that is certain. It would be a supreme sacrifice for the sake of conscience. It might end in sin were the woman not our Anne Dallas; I am not afraid that she, or Kit, would play with danger. The honour that made them fulfil the pledge to Mr. Latham would make them fight against the memory of each other after it was done. I certainly do not think that a hard battle, a tremendous sacrifice, suffering, are to be avoided at the cost of what our conscience says is wrong. The one point for Anne to establish is where her duty lies. That established, she must do it. I have faith to believe that doing it will bring her true happiness. Peace is no slight good, my dears! I've not seen people win greater happiness by self-indulgence than by doing a hard thing because it was right." Mrs. Berkley spoke slowly, her hand on Anne's head. She was not finding her verdict easy to render.

"Mr. Latham would not let Anne keep her promise if he knew," said Joan, convinced, but still rebellious.

"Of course not. No man would," said Anne. "But how could he know? I can play my part. No one would tell him. Kit said he would, but we all know he'd die first, and if he did tell Richard, then I surely would not marry Kit. He would not be himself if he could do such a thing as that. Ah, well, dear Mrs. Berkley and Joan, there's no way out! And I am a happy girl, even though I am a little bit unhappy, to have an opportunity to do what I can do in helping Richard. How often we've said that!"

"Too much protest implies a doubt, dear child," said Mrs. Berkley. "But I've no doubt of your happiness; in one way or another it is coming to you. Little Anne has ordered tea for you. Come and drink it. Let us try to postpone further thought of our troubles. Don't you think solutions come clearer and quicker when we don't strive too hard for them?"

While Anne was crying her heart out and making up her mind to say farewell to the happiness which she desired, Kit walked away from her on air. There had been a moment of complete dismay, a crushing sense of defeat, but it had been but a moment. Three and a half blocks it may have accompanied him on his way, but then he flung it off with a sudden reaction of mind, recalling to him his youth, his will, the utter impossibility that his dominating love for Anne should not conquer all obstacles in its way. To be sure there was Richard Latham and it was a pity! It was true that Richard was too valuable to the world to be further crippled, although it was somewhat wearisome to hear everybody insisting on this truth. It was also true, even truer, that as a man Latham deserved the best that the world could give him; Anne Dallas was decidedly the best thing in the world.

Kit repeated these facts to himself, but in this case it was

literally true that he could not hear himself think. His heart-beats, the blood racing through his arteries, the tumult of joy that had set up its pæans in him drowned all comments that he made in his thoughts on Richard Latham's claim. He was going to marry Anne! Anne loved him! He loved Anne and they both knew all about it! What a miraculous revelation it had been! How completely unaware of its coming they had been! What a proof it was that love was actually far greater, far stronger than the lover! It had broken down barriers and leaped forth, not so much in spite of them, as ignoring them. They had not foreseen its escape; they had not known of its presence, or had not admitted the knowledge to their consciousness. What splendour, what glory, what joy there was in being an instrument in such potent hands!

And Anne! Of course he had left her crying on little Anne's shoulder. Kit laughed aloud, remembering how troubled little Anne had looked, how she had patted and purred over Anne and had bidden Kit run along, as if she had been his small grandmother.

It was hard to think of Anne as suffering. But that was but the first shock to her sensitive conscience. She would see, probably saw by this time, how supremely right it was to love him. It was such a compelling love that it swept from sight gnat-like scruples. He should see her in a few hours and then—she would not cry!

By the time he had reached his aunt's house Kit had decided that Anne should be married in his mother's wedding dress, kept sacredly by his aunt. Miss Carrington had loved her youthful sister-in-law, and had treasured her memory as she had taken care of the boy whose birth had cost his mother's life.

Kit also decided that for the first year he and Anne would live in a hired house near New York. He congratulated himself that he had arranged to go into business with his college friend

before he had known that he should so soon have a wife to support. He wondered what rentals were now. He had an idea that they were high and houses scarce, but he knew that he should find one within his limit, because all these details would arrange themselves. No question of that, when the supreme fact that they loved each other had so arranged itself!

Kit came into the house whistling, his face crimson, his hat on the back of his head, his eyes so queer that Helen, meeting him on the piazza, actually thought for a moment that he had been drinking.

"Hallo, Nell!" he cried, jovially, confirming her suspicion. "How nice you look! Isn't it a corking day? Maybe it's a bit too hot, but I like heat. Are you going out, or coming in? You look mighty nice to-day, Helen!"

Helen's suspicion shifted; this was not wine. And as to the other, the second exciting influence of that trilogy, which not to love Luther is said to have warned, left a man a fool his life-long? Helen could not see how Kit could have fallen under that influence.

"Mr. Lanbury is coming, Kit," she said.

"Is he? Who is he?" asked Kit. "Oh, is that the chap you told me about? Coming to get you, Helen? Lucky dog! I hope he's all right? I don't suppose I've ever had enough sympathy for happy or unhappy lovers. Are you going to make this Lonsberry happy, Nell?"

Helen's eyes narrowed. She looked as though she might slap Kit, but she did not.

"Well, at least you're not a dog in the manger, Kit!" she said, and Kit came to himself enough to realize that Helen was establishing the legend that Kit had wanted her, but could not have her. Well, if she felt better that way! It did not matter. Anne mattered, nothing else, and he was going to have her!

"Mr. Lanbury is not Lonsberry. Please get his name straight. He'll arrive to-night. You'll see a handsome man, Kit-boy, and a wealthy one, who uses his money in big ways. I wish I could get him to see Mr. Latham. He's interested in the theatre. He may not have time to go there this visit. I suppose Latham is at home, if he could go?" inquired Helen.

"Yes," said unwary Kit. "He has a famous manager lunching with him to-day. I suppose it has something to do with the play. The fourth act is well on toward completion."

"What a detailed and up-to-the-minute bulletin!" laughed Helen. "Did you see the manager? Was it Belasco?"

"I didn't ask; no, I didn't see him; I wasn't there," said Kit. "I met—I went to the Berkleys' with young Peter's book, and An—Miss Dallas was there."

"Oh-h! I see!" cried Helen, archly. "When the cat's not precisely away, but watching another mouse hole, the mice will play, *n'est ce pas?* Kit, get that small perambulating catechism you're so fond of to teach you the commandments! I've a vague recollection of one that forbids coveting your neighbour's wife."

By this time Kit was awake to his surroundings; Helen's rapier voice had pricked his consciousness.

"So have I, and it's one I particularly admire, because if you don't get thinking things you'll hardly start doing them. I assure you I have not a neighbour whose wife I envy him! There's another nice commandment, Helen, about bearing false witness against your neighbour, isn't there? You're judging me uncharitably, Helen, the fair! What shall I give you when you marry this Mr. Longworthy?" Kit smiled guilelessly.

"Proof that I'm not worth the trouble to remember his name!" said Helen, furiously, tears of rage springing to her eyes. "I could hate you, Christopher Carrington, quite easily, and if ever I do it won't be well for you!"

“You won’t hate me, Nell; you’re too good a sport,” said Kit. “Why should you? I’m the same old Kit you’ve known and liked a little bit for so long!”

“Heavens above us, Kit, don’t I know that?” cried Helen, and fairly ran away.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Made in Heaven*

**M**INERVA," said Miss Carrington, "I am not feeling well. I need diversion." Minerva scanned her mistress critically, and said:

"You may be pale, but you don't look sick. You are probably bothered."

"Do you like him, Minerva?" asked Miss Carrington, peevishly.

"He would be called handsome by most people, and his clothes are just about it," said Minerva, cautiously. "But for what there is about him which isn't bought I'm not able to say much. No, Miss Carrington, if I was to speak freely I would say that I don't care for him. Miss Abercrombie's going to marry him whatever I say, or you, either, so I put it to you: What's the use of saying it, or thinking it, for that matter? I guess you were worrying over it, instead of sleeping as you might better have done and the result the same, and that's why you feel sort of used up. Miss Helen's made up her mind and you may's well go along with it. I've noticed the only thing you can do about a marriage is to order a present for it. What they set out to do, they do for the most part. She's none of your responsibility, anyway."

"No, that's true. I shall have her father here in a few days, I hope. But they've gone to ride, and I'm certain they will come back with everything settled, Minerva," said Miss Carrington.

"'Twas before they started," returned Minerva with a Gallic shrug that accorded ill with her most un-Gallic stiffness. "Miss Carrington, Miss Helen has that horse you got for her, the black one, but Mr. Lanbury wanted to ride Master—Mr. Kit's own, and Mr. Kit wouldn't let him. You and I know he won't let any man set astride that horse whose character and hand on the bridle isn't known to him, but Mr. Lanbury didn't know it, and he took personal offence at getting refused. Miss Helen lifted her eyebrows at him to signify: 'What could you expect of a young man who wanted to ride with her himself?' and Mr. Lanbury lifted his back at her to mean: 'Is that what's the matter?' He looked as pleased as every man does when he's carried off the girl the other chap wanted. It was pictured in our illustrated lectures in connection with Sabines. So Mr. Lanbury's been given to understand that Mr. Kit's gnashing his teeth, when the real truth about his teeth is that he wouldn't bite."

Minerva looked outraged by this perversion of facts affecting the dignity of the Carringtons. Miss Carrington regarded her with amusement, realizing that Minerva should not be allowed so much as implied comment upon her guest, but finding rebuke difficult when Minerva had for so long ably seconded her own efforts.

"Well, Minerva, I am bound to acknowledge that I see no symptoms of Kit's estimating his own folly properly," Miss Carrington said instead. "But I am disturbed. I believe I'd enjoy a call from that amusing Berkley child. Will you step around to Merton's and telephone Mrs. Berkley; ask her if little Anne may come to see me? But before you go, get me into my kimono and make me comfortable on the couch."

Minerva did as she was bidden and departed for the drug store to ask to borrow little Anne.

She returned with the message that little Anne would shortly

appear, and, indeed she came sooner than could have been expected, because she had already been made ready for a call in Latham Street.

"Be careful, Anne, not to say the smallest word to Miss Carrington of Miss Dallas's unhappy morning here. Remember, no one wants that sort of thing repeated," warned Mrs. Berkley, smoothing the child's bobbed hair before putting on her hat, merely for the pleasure of stroking her head.

"Oh, Mother, as though I would when she was crying about Kit!" cried little Anne, reproachfully; and Mrs. Berkley felt helplessly, as she so often did, that her younger daughter was aware of and equal to the situation. Minerva, on the watch for little Anne, met her and took her up to Miss Carrington's sitting room.

"Oh, I'm very sorry! I didn't know you invited me because you were sick," said little Anne, her solicitude banishing her shyness as she entered and saw Miss Carrington on the couch.

"I am not ill, my dear; only not equal to playing my part. Do you understand that?" Miss Carrington waited for little Anne's reply.

"I think so," said little Anne, doubtfully. "In school last winter I was like that. Sister said I must be growing, but it was tonsils. Afterward they found out they were swollen. I didn't remember to tell, but they looked and saw."

"My tonsils are all right, and I hardly think I am growing. Do you suppose it could be that I am grown—grown old, Anne?" suggested Miss Carrington.

"Well," said little Anne, delicately, "I don't think when a person is seven—although I'm 'most eight—you can tell so well when people are old. I don't believe you are, or anyway, not much. My mother seems not—not quite so old, but there's Mr. Allen, the grocer's father who carries things when there's no boy, he's much, much older! And you are so quick, Miss

Carrington, when you're not lying down and are feeling well! Oh, no; I'm sure it isn't being old! Could I read to you, do you s'pose? I can read pretty well, much better than I can do arithmetic."

"I hardly think that I should enjoy your doing arithmetic half as well as reading, child," said Miss Carrington. "I should not care to have you add up my totals. I am a lonely, disappointed failure, little Anne, with nothing before me but to die. And I don't know how to die!"

Instantly little Anne jumped up and caught Miss Carrington around the neck. She kissed her cold cheek hard, crying:

"I know how to die! I know just how; I almost did die. It's as easy! I'll love you and come to see you lots. What shall I read?"

"Suppose we try 'Cranford': I'd like to see you reading it. You are as appropriate to it as an illustration. It is that red leather book on the table. Do you think you can get on with it?"

"If the words are not too long, and if the sense isn't sort of underneath," said little Anne, possessing herself of the book. She bestowed herself on a straight chair beside Miss Carrington's couch, her feet on a stool, fluttering the pages, her dark, short hair falling forward around her eager face. She made a dear little Reynolds picture, Miss Carrington thought, feeling that she had been wise to send for Anne.

"Don't you think it's strange the way meaning of books gets 'way underneath, when the words on top are quite easy? Sometimes when I understand all the words I don't understand the book one bit. Oh, what very nice pictures!" Little Anne looked appreciatively at Hugh Thompson's beruffled ladies and small-waisted gentlemen.

"Shall I begin at the beginning? I can't stay to read it all, I'm afraid, because I'm going to Mr. Latham's. He called me

to the telephone, me, myself, and told me to come because he had something splendid to tell me. And I talked to him and told him I'd come, and he could hear me perfec'ly; he said so. What shall I read, please?"

"Shut your eyes and open the book, and read wherever it opens," said Miss Carrington.

The reading was but begun when Miss Carrington held up a finger.

"I hear Miss Abercrombie coming with a friend of hers. We can't read, Anne. They are coming up."

Miss Carrington seemed disturbed.

Little Anne let the leather-bound volume drop in a V on her knee like a red velvet cap, and looked curiously toward the door.

She saw Miss Abercrombie, in her russet riding clothes, come in and run swiftly to Miss Carrington's side, and drop on one knee, her other russet-leather-booted foot resting on its toe as she laid her radiant head on the old lady's hands.

Behind her followed slowly, halting midway to the couch, a tall man with dark eyes and hair, perfectly clad, smiling an amused smile beyond little Anne's analytic powers, but which she did not like.

Miss Carrington, looking over Helen at him, knew that he was appraising the scene with no intention to take part in a comedy.

"Oh, dearest old friend," cried Helen, her voice thrilling, "give me your best wishes and loving sympathy! George and I——"

She stopped, as if overcome.

"Congratulations, Mr. Lanbury!" said Miss Carrington, extending her hand. "I cannot rise. You surely will be the justly envied man of this year!"

"Thanks, Miss Carrington. Also of all succeeding years," said George Lanbury. "Helen is not merely a jewel; she's the crown jewels and the crown. I flatter myself that her wit and

beauty, with my wealth and her father's position, will be a combination hard to beat. I didn't show her the ring, but I brought it along. She wouldn't give me an answer in the spring. but she did say she'd send for me if she decided my way. I rather thought she'd see it as I did. Nice girl all the same, Helen, to see it! Come and get your ring, my royal princess!"

With a deprecating and inquiring glance at Miss Carrington, Helen obediently arose and went over to her betrothed. He produced from his pocket an immense diamond and a guarding hoop of diamonds. He put them both on Helen's finger, kissing her repeatedly, with an ardour that declared an old woman and a child not to be worth minding.

Little Anne hastily slid down from her high chair; her eyes were wide and alarmed.

"I must go right away, Miss Carrington," she said. "I've got to go now, thank you; I've had a pleasant time."

"Who's the lean squab?" asked George Lanbury.

"Good-bye, little Anne. I like to have you beside me. Thank you, dear, and come again," Miss Carrington quickly interposed.

"Is it possible that you are joining the cult?" asked Helen. The sight of Anne Berkley at this moment—recalling where and how she had last seen her, underscoring the contrast between the great stone flashing on her hand, the man who had just put it there, and what she had hoped would be her fate—came upon Helen as an evil omen. "Small dark banshees seem to bring bad luck," she added, involuntarily.

"I tried to find four-leaf clovers for you, Miss Abercrombie, because you hunted for them so hard that day with Kit, and I wanted you to have good luck for giving me Kitca, but I couldn't find one. I'll try, though, to get you some."

Little Anne ran every step of the way to Latham Street. She was late and the desire to get there was strong upon her. Some-

thing had made her uncomfortable; she did not know what it was, but she wanted Anne Dallas and the beloved poet.

"Well, dear mite, how late you are!" cried Richard Latham as little Anne came running down the garden to join him and Anne where they sat.

"I was calling on Miss Carrington; she asked me on the telephone, too, only it wasn't her own; she hasn't one, and I didn't talk myself this time. She isn't 'xactly well; she was lying down. I was going to read to her, but Miss Abercrombie came in, all in goldeny riding things, and kneeled down to Miss Carrington. There was a man, too. He called her over to get it and he gave her the biggest diamond ring ever in all this world, and another crusty diamond one to put on top of it. And he—he—he said they would be married, and so did she."

Little Anne poured forth her story rapidly, but she could not say that George Lanbury had kissed Helen.

"Dear me, Anne, what a fairy tale!" cried Richard.

"Oh, no; honest it isn't, Mr. Latham," protested little Anne, misunderstanding. "It's all true, and I didn't tell quite all."

"The man wasn't Kit!" cried Richard, startled by this hint of something withheld.

Little Anne shook her head hard and glanced with a wise little smile at Anne. Anne hated herself for it, but she laid a warning finger on her lip. Little Anne shook her head still harder and said:

"I guess it wasn't Kit! He's a big man. When he laughs it doesn't look like something funny, but as if you were funny yourself. He's not like Kit, dear Kit! He's named George. That's what she called him. So I came here, and I'm glad I did."

"So are we," said Richard Latham. "When I called you up, Miss Anne Berkley, it was to tell you something that makes me so happy that I had to ask my best, most intimate lady friend to be told about it."

"Me?" cried little Anne, ecstatically striking her breast.

"You and this other Anne are my very dearest friends," Richard gravely assured her. "The other Anne knew all about it; I did not have to tell her. Little Anne, my play is finished!"

"Oh, is it?" cried little Anne, clasping her hands fervently as she always did when moved.

Though she did not understand precisely the full import of what she had been told, she realized that Richard Latham had long been at work upon this play. That it was finished meant something so great that she could not grasp it. This only proved it the more glorious.

Anne Dallas with an effort that little Anne could not see, though she did see how white and worn the girl looked, took up the tale.

"It is the most beautiful play that ever was, dear little Anne. And it is done, every word! It is called 'The Guerdon.' The great New York manager, who was here the other day, is going to put the play on in the autumn, if he can get it ready. It will be acted by the best actors in the country, and the scenery will be a dream! And on the first night—what do you suppose? Mr. Latham will have the big box next the stage, and he is going to invite some people who are dear to him to sit with him in that box! Mr. Wilberforce, the famous painter, will be one of them, but who else do you suppose, little Anne?"

"I don't know," little Anne managed to say, huskily, choked by a hope that she dared not admit.

"Little Anne Berkley for one!" cried Anne, triumphantly, seizing the child's face between her hands to kiss it.

"Me? At night? In New York? Oh, oh!" Little Anne looked almost faint from the shock of this overwhelming joy. "Never, never in all my life have I been once to the theatre, and I have to go to bed at eight, no matter what! And I've only been to New York three times, and once was to a dentist, and

once to the zoo—the other I was a baby. Oh, I'll pray my mother will let me go! Mr. Latham, I'd die for you over and over."

"Live for me, little Anne, please!" Richard laughed. "Come here, small Dynamic, and thank me at closer range."

Little Anne ran to him and perched on the arm of his chair. She bent over and kissed him gently, in spite of her tumultuous delight. Little Anne always felt that Richard might be hurt if she touched him as recklessly as she did people who could see.

"But who else do you think will be in the author's box, that's Mr. Latham's, you know?" Anne resumed the game.

"I don't—Kit?" guessed little Anne.

"Oh, no!" cried Anne, sharply, taken by surprise. She covered the cry with a laugh. "Can't you guess, when Mr. Latham just told you who were his two best friends?"

"'Course!" exclaimed little Anne, scornful of herself. "Miss Anne—you!"

"No, and yes, little Anne!" Anne said. "There will be no Miss Anne then."

"What will you be? Why not?" demanded little Anne.

"I shall be Anne Latham; the other person in the author's box will be the poet's wife," said Anne.

She went over to Richard and leaned on the other arm of his chair. He put out his hand without speaking and took hers. Anne leant her head upon his; little Anne saw her lips move.

"You'd think she was saying a prayer," thought the child. "Shall you be married?" she asked aloud. Her voice was awed, her eyes big. "Is that why you won't be you?"

"That is why I shall be I! That is exactly why I shall be I, and no one else," Anne murmured. "I might not be myself, but quite another sort of person if I weren't married to you then, mightn't I, dear Richard? We shall be married when that

wonderful night comes around, and you and I are in the box, little Anne! The play is all done, every word, and you are to see it on its very first night and I shall see it, too, but then I shall be our poet's wife. Tell your mother and Joan what we have told you, and tell them it is not a secret; they may tell whomever they choose, and so may you, dearie. Are you proud and glad, little Anne? I am."

Richard, smiling and joyous, got possession of Anne's other hand. He knew she was talking excitedly to something within herself rather than to the child. He felt her tremble, but he set it down to her sensitiveness. He would have known that Anne would not talk calmly of her approaching marriage, nor of the great First Night of the play.

But little Anne held in her small hands and child brain the clue which Richard lacked. Wonder, dismay, a question crept into her wide eyes as she stared at Anne. She saw what Richard could not see, the tears that were gathering in Anne's eyes and which she feared might fall on the hands with which Richard held hers so fast that she could not dry the tears.

Little Anne slipped down and around to Anne. With the corner of her handkerchief, bordered with kittens, she painstakingly wiped away Anne's tears.

"I think I'd better go home," said little Anne, slowly, all her joyousness gone.

Then Anne knew that her fear that little Anne might betray her by an unwelcome allusion to that memorable morning at her home was groundless.

"Why so soon, little Anne, dear?" asked Richard. "Why must you go?"

"I was first at Miss Carrington's, and it took too long," said little Anne. "I've got to feed Kitca and ask Mother if she thinks I may go to see the play; I want to know quick. Will it be soon?"

"October is the earliest we may hope for, dear. There's no end of time to wait!" said Richard.

"I was born in October; maybe I'll be eight by the time of the play; then I'll be something different, too. No, I won't; you don't see anything when you have a birthday. I remember when I was going to be six I thought I'd change. 'Course not! I didn't know you'd be married, Miss Anne, darling! I truly must go home. I've got to see Mother right away! Honest, Mr. Latham, I don't know's I can bear it, I'll be so happy if I go that night! I've got to tell Mother Anne won't be Miss Anne then; she hates to have me forget to say that! I've had one engagement and one wedding this afternoon—the news of 'em. It's a great deal. I feel a little queer. Good-bye. And I couldn't thank you no matter how I tried, so I might as well go now."

Little Anne passively allowed herself to be kissed, and beat a rapid retreat. She had corked up her feelings to the last possible instant. Though the maturity which she anticipated attaining in October, when she was eight, was still some weeks distant, something told the child that Anne was hiding an aching heart.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *The End of the Play*

**A**LTHOUGH Mrs. Berkley readily consented to little Anne's seeing the first performance of Richard Latham's play, and although this was an event to dream of by night and by day until its distant date, little Anne was not completely happy in its anticipation.

The play was so much one with Anne Dallas that they could not be recalled separately. It loomed above all else in little Anne's mind that when the great night came Anne would be married. Everyone spoke impressively of being married. Little Anne absorbed the general attitude toward it and was deeply impressed by the fact that her dear Anne would be in the same box with her that first night of the play—she wondered what sort of a box it could possibly be—no longer her Anne, but married.

Twice little Anne had come upon Anne weeping her heart out as tempestuously as she had cried on the child's shoulder. Anne was not happy; she was growing so thin and pale that Mrs. Berkley and Joan discussed it in little Anne's hearing, though in terms intentionally, she thought, beyond her complete understanding.

Little Anne was too loving to be quite happy about the play if Anne were not happy, too; she had grasped the fact that this unhappiness was connected with the play and being married; evidently Anne dreaded the night when she would sit in that mysterious box that held several grown people, but which did not seem to strike any one as an unusual type of box.

Kit Carrington came often to the Berkley house these days, also to Joan's. Little Anne found him in both houses the same; he was invariably a gloomy, dull Kit, from whom only she could extract anything like his old smile, and she but rarely.

Kit looked not only unhappy and ill, but little Anne thought that he looked chronically "mad," and surely there could have been nothing less like her old Kit than "a grouch!" It was Peter who said that Kit had a steady grouch on, so little Anne knew that she must be right.

It was a melancholy state of things, and when she was not playing with Monica, or interested in something else, which was the greater part of the time, little Anne, like Miniver Cheevy, "thought, and thought and thought about it."

One day Kit came to Joan's when Anne was there. It was a Sunday afternoon, so Antony was at home. Kit stalked in with such a desperate air that little Anne told herself that he looked as if he was going to do something awful! He nearly kicked Guard, who had grown enormously, but had not outgrown his first adoration of Kit, and toward whom Kit held himself as sponsor because he had endorsed the dog in his infancy and advised his purchase. Kit did not kick the exuberant animal but he visibly refrained from doing so, and patted him instead. It was wonder enough for little Anne that he had felt like kicking. He hardly noticed the child—another alarming symptom.

Little Anne retired to a corner with Barbara, now capable of being led there, and played house with the baby in a one-sided fashion. But her ears were alert to catch a conversation in which she was forgotten.

"I've stood it to the last possible instant!" declared Kit, savagely. "Anne will not see me. She shall! Have I no rights?"

"Don't you think, Kit, dear, she is afraid to see you?" Joan suggested. "If she will not marry you, isn't it better to avoid

unnecessary pain? Poor Anne shows that she already has all that she can endure."

"Poor Anne has no right to be enduring it," retorted Kit. "I will see her; I must! What do you say, Antony?"

"I say I wouldn't like to be in your shoes, and I don't know how I'd play up if I were, but the right thing is to get out and not torture a girl who is trying to be square, who loves you all the time, good old Kit," said Antony.

"Well, if you call that being square, I don't," declared Kit. "She's got it all twisted. I don't mean to torture her, you know well enough, except to talk it out once; we've got to! I never had a word with her except that one time when we found out how we both felt, and then what was it? We were taken off our feet; couldn't talk! I want to put it up to her as temperately as I can. Then if she decides against me, all right; I go. And I mean to listen fairly to her arguments. But I don't go till that is done. I realize that it's hard to judge a question on which your own happiness hinges, but it doesn't seem to me right to Latham for Anne to marry him. Putting me out of it, it doesn't seem right to Latham. If he knew that Anne loved me, not him—wanted to marry me, not him—would he let her keep her promise to him? Of course he wouldn't! So it doesn't seem fair to him to go on with it. Maybe that's sophistry; I'm sure I can't tell! But I do know that I don't feel as though I could go on living if Anne marries Latham."

Kit's head went down on his arms with a movement of such despair that little Anne was frightened.

So that was it! Anne didn't want to marry Mr. Latham, not even to sit in the box! And she did want to marry Kit; and Kit would die if she married Mr. Latham. And Mr. Latham would not marry Anne if all this were as clear to him as it had suddenly become to little Anne. Kit had said that it was not fair to Mr. Latham; evidently someone was making a blunder. Here little

Anne's thoughts became cloudy. Could the blunderer be Anne? Well, this fact was clear: two of little Anne's dearest friends were miserable, all because Mr. Latham did not know that they would far prefer to marry each other than to let Anne go to the play as the poet's wife. Now that these points were radiantly clear to the child, it was equally clear that a simple mistake of this kind could and should be corrected.

"Do you think Anne will consent to see you, Kit?" Joan was asking when little Anne's attention returned to the conversation.

"She has said that I might see her to-morrow afternoon," said Kit. "I'm to go to walk with her; I told her that I must see her where there'd be no risk of interruption. I know it's no use."

"I'm sure of that, poor Kit!" agreed Joan. "Anne is not to be moved."

"And she is dead right!" added Antony. "I'm bound to say I think she's dead right, and no end of a trump to stick to her principles. I'm sorry enough, Kit, and it seems mean in me to be so happy with my little old lady here when you're playing in such hard luck, but honour among thieves can't be more binding than among honest folk. I took off my hat to Anne Dallas when the trouble began, and I'm bare-headed yet, figuratively speaking."

"Easy enough to admire a martyrdom when you're in heaven," growled Kit.

Little Anne, so absorbed in the conversation, forgot Barbara, and the baby, still uncertain in her balance, lost it and struck her chin against a chair. Her wail aroused Joan to the presence of little Anne. As she rescued her child, more injured in feelings than in flesh, Joan glanced sharply at her small sister, wondering what she had heard and understood. Nothing could have been more blank of other interest than Barbara's possible hurt than was the face that Anne turned up to her sister.

"We played house, Joan, and Babs was my child," she said. "I don't think she 'xactly understands, but she played nicely. She sort of tipped over, but not far. I don't believe it hurt her badly."

"You kept her so quiet that I forgot you both," said Joan. "Did the time seem long to you, Anne?"

"Mercy, no! I was awf'ly interested," said little Anne, truthfully. "Maybe I'll be a Sister of Charity instead of a Carmelite; then I could have an asylum. Babies are so dear!"

And Joan dared ask no more lest she should hint what, after all, Anne might not have heard.

The next afternoon, strong in her righteous purpose, and, little-Anne-like, unassailed by doubt when she was convinced of her facts, little Anne set forth to visit Mr. Latham without taking any one, even her mother, into her confidence. She passed Anne, looking white and miserable, but with the light of determination in her eyes, as she turned into Latham Street.

"Kit is coming; I saw him 'way down the street," volunteered little Anne. Then she ran on, leaving Anne to wonder at her apparent knowledge of the intended meeting.

"Well, small Anne!" cried Richard Latham as little Anne came running down the broad walk through the centre of his garden. "You surely are Anne, the well-come! I feel precisely like having a comrade of seven-most-eight! I'm half afraid you are too sedate for me, Miss Berkley! Do you think you can stoop to play with a poet who has finished his play and arranged for its production, and with a man who is too happy to be merely a man? Anne, have I slender, pointed ears? And do you chance to see pipes sticking out of my pocket?"

"Your ears are slender, but I think they are round at the top," said little Anne, conscientiously examining them as Richard stooped to her. "And there aren't any pipes. Don't you smoke cigars, anyway?"

"Oh, not smoking pipes! I thought you, of all people, would know! I mean pipes like Pan's. The fauns play on the sort I mean. Never mind; perhaps I am a man. Do you happen to have a string with you? No? Pity! What I really am is a rose-coloured air-balloon, and I'm liable to sail over the house-tops unless you tie a string to me and hold me fast. Have you the string, little Anne?"

Little Anne was laughing, yet her eyes were gravely puzzled.

"Must I tie you down?" she asked, not realizing that she had come to do this and more. "I have no string."

"Then let us run a race up and down the broad path, and around the little paths on the right. Then up and down the middle again, and around the little paths on the left! I can run faster than you can, but, on the other hand, I can't see you and you can see me, so it will be a fair game. If you catch me I pay a forfeit. I buy you a box of candy. If I catch you, you pay me a forfeit; you take the box of candy that I buy for you! I think that's the best-arranged arrangement that all the aggregated arrangers ever arranged!" Richard laughed, triumphantly.

Little Anne danced up and down.

"I do think you are the funniest! And nicest!" she cried. "I should think you would make plays and poetry! I do love Kit dearly; he's so nice you have to, but you think of the most things I ever! Why does Anne, Miss Anne, rather not marry you?"

Richard Latham's hand stopped in mid-air on the way to pull down his hat in preparation for the race.

"Anne! What are you saying?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, never mind now; maybe we'd better race first, because we'll be so warm we'll need to sit down; then we could talk," said little Anne, comfortably. "I came to tell you about it. Kit said if you knew you wouldn't let her; he said it wasn't fair to

you. So I thought I'd tell you. Anne loves Kit, so does he—I mean they both do.”

Anne was getting frightened; Richard's face was ghastly white.

“How can you, a child, know this?” Richard spoke with difficulty.

“Why, it was one morning at our house. They kind of looked at each other and began to say they loved each other such a lot, and Anne cried: ‘No, no, no. Richard!’ And Kit had to go away. She made him. And she cried terrible. And Kit says it's wrong to marry you when she'd rather not, but she just will, and Antony says she's a trump, but you can see Joan's so sorry she can't tell what a trump is. And Anne, you know, looks dreadful, white and thin— Oh, I forgot!” Little Anne checked herself, shocked that an allusion to Mr. Latham's blindness had escaped her. Of all things she most dreaded to say anything that might hurt Richard Latham. Richard put out a hand, gropingly. He found little Anne's shoulder and held it tight. He swayed slightly as he turned to go up the garden, slowly, like an old man. He leaned on the frightened child who walked beside him, looking up at him with dilated eyes.

“I want to find the bench,” said Richard, whom little Anne had always seen going confidently about the garden.

Little Anne led him to the bench and Richard dropped on it heavily.

“Tell me again. I can't understand. Anne, *my* Anne, loves Christopher Carrington? And he loves her, and they both know this? And she is marrying me because she thinks she must? Is this what you are telling me? It can't be true! You are only little Anne. You can't know!”

Richard's voice, faint at first, gathered strength as he spoke; it ended in a groan. Because this was little Anne, too young

to imagine the story, too clear-brained to distort it, he knew that it was true. A thousand tiny proofs of it seemed to pierce his memory even as he denied it.

"Yes, I do know!" little Anne insisted, nodding her head hard. "I was there when they found out. They kept saying how s'prised they were. Kit wants to talk it over; that's what he's doing now, but Anne won't ever change, Joan said. He couldn't talk it over, 'cause Anne wouldn't see him till now. He said you wouldn't let her marry you if you knew she'd rather not; Kit said that. He said it wasn't fair to you. So I came around to let you know. Won't you let her marry you? Can't she sit in the box that play night?" Richard Latham started up and fell back with a cry. His head dropped on the back of the garden bench; he was shaking.

"Go away, little Anne," he said. "Go away. Go home. We'll—we'll race—sometime. I'll remember—the candy. You win, little Anne! Go, dear, go!"

"Oh, wasn't it right to come? Was it a sin to tell you? Was it a sin? I never did a sin that made any one sick when they were so well before! Was it a sin?" cried little Anne, terror-stricken by the result of her mission.

"It was—just right—little Anne! I'm—delighted—to know. But I'm a little—a little—surprised, you see. Please, go, dear little Anne!" Richard managed to say.

Little Anne went. At the gate she looked back. Richard Latham sat as she had left him. The garden looked more than usually beautiful, peaceful. Child as she was she felt the solemnity of the bowed figure of the blind poet, alone among his flowers.

In the meantime, Anne had gone on and had met Kit coming toward her down shady Latham Street. She had not given him her hand; he had turned and joined her with but the slightest murmur of greeting. They made no attempt to talk

as they went out toward the river. Kit directed their course away from the spot to which he and Helen had walked on that recent afternoon. They came to a pretty place where the bank sloped down under willows, and where there was a bit of white, sandy beach.

"No use going farther, Anne," said Kit, peremptorily. "I want to know what you mean to do about it? I have a right to know."

"You already know," said Anne, as sternly as he. "I have told you all that there is to say. In less than three months I shall marry Richard Latham. That sums up all that I could say to you, Kit."

"But I love you! You have no idea how I want you, love you!" cried Kit.

"And that you're not to say to me!" said Anne with a stern monotony of voice, with which she bridled her pain as she saw the change in Kit's sunny face.

"It is easy for you. You don't care, after all! I suppose women can't love as a man does," said Kit.

An expression of adoring love and pity flitted over Anne's face. Then it was gone, and she said:

"There is no profit in that sort of recrimination, you know. The instrument for measuring and comparing mental suffering has not been invented. It is hard enough for me. Be satisfied of that! Do you want me to be miserable?"

Suddenly she let herself go, as if she deliberately threw away reserve.

"Kit," she began, her voice deep with love and longing, "it is costing me so much that in simple mercy you must never again add to it by seeking me. After a while we will be friends—meet as friends. Always we shall be friends, even before we may safely meet. That is a great word were we not longing to speak another, greater word, that is forbidden us. I shall marry

Richard and do my best to love him as a wife should, as any one who knew him would love him, one would think, best of all! Listen to me, dear: If you were a man who in sober, sane choice could want me to break my promise to this man, I should never have loved you. Shall we be selfish, Kit, cruel, false, trying to justify ourselves with pretty words? Kit, you are so dear to me that I want to help you to keep your honour bright! I should not have seen you to-day but that I knew in seeing you I could help you to see something far greater than I. I can't cure your grief, Kit, your lonely longing, nor my own! For a time we must suffer. But I know we shall win out, because we are doing our best. I came to beg you to make the renunciation that is the true, manly course. I don't want you to do right only because I stand by my word. Say to me—and mean it, Kit, because in compelling your will to this you will gain peace of mind—say to me: 'Anne, keep your word to Richard Latham and God bless you! I would not have you make me happy by defrauding him.' Tell me this, Kit; tell me you see it is right!"

Kit stood silent beside her, his head bowed, his hands clinching and relaxing. The tiny waves of the river's slow flow lapped softly on the white sand; a sparrow emphasized the stillness with his lovely brief song.

"It is right, Anne," poor Kit said at last.

"And"—Anne put out her hands to him almost as a mother would put out her hands to the child who feared to walk—"And I don't want you to make me happy by defrauding Richard Latham. Marry him, Anne, Anne, Anne, my darling, marry him! And God bless and keep you, as He surely does!"

Kit threw back his head, holding both her hands crushed in his.

Anne's face was alight with triumph; her eyes glowed and warmed Kit's heart.

"I'll be all right. This is right," Kit said. "I've been

crazed, Anne, but don't worry over me; I'll be all right, little Captain!"

"Oh, you blessed boy!" cried Anne in spite of herself.

Gently she disengaged her hands.

"It's a lot to be able to think of each other in the way we now shall."

"I'd better take you back again. Oh, Anne, I was ready with arguments that you never could have answered, and I haven't spoken one of them! Isn't there another side? Couldn't you hear me, even yet? I don't know what you did to me, but all my arguments seemed answered when you began to speak."

"We've settled it, Kit, and I'm too tired to argue. I think you answered yourself as you went along, only you had not consciously heard the answers. You are no sophist, dear Kit! So when I spoke of duty it needed no more than the word. You had argued on the surface of your mind, but all the time your will stood true! I'm proud of you, dear Kit, and thankful that I did not love a man less fine than my husband is. I do love Richard, Kit; we both well may love him. I'm a little tired. Yes, please take me back," Anne ended, abruptly.

"You are deadly white and you're thinner, Anne," said Kit, forgetting his pain in anxiety as he looked at the sweet, weary face beside him.

"Just tired; that's all," said Anne, smiling. "I haven't slept much of late. I fancy we both find that night brings the enemy's hardest attacks. You are thinner, too. Have you plans?"

"To go away soon, to New York, and go into business there," said Kit, accepting her lead.

They talked quietly as they returned homeward, till just before they reached Latham Street, Kit stopped short.

"It can't be good-bye so casually, Anne! Am I mad that I give you up like this, or have you put a spell upon me? I

think I'm dreaming and must awaken. It's like a nightmare in which you can't move," he said, hoarsely.

"It's only good-night, Kit, but good-bye is its foundation. You will awake, my dear, quite well and strong, for the nightmare is over. Good-night, Kit, and with all my heart I pray God bless you. When you get home to think, remind yourself that you spared poor Anne all that you could, and be thankful that you are her comfort, and not the least, wee pain to her, as a tiny lack in you would be. Good-night, Kit! Dearest, good-night, Sir Christopher!"

Anne forced her drawn lips to smile as she paused for a moment at Richard's garden gate.

Kit looked down on her without an attempt to smile back at her. They did not touch each other's hands.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, and turned away.

Anne stood for an instant, her hand on the top of the gate. Then with a long, fluttering breath she groped for the latch, lifted it and entered the garden.

Before her on the bench, one arm thrown across its back, his head erect, pale, but quietly smiling toward her as his quick ear heard the click of the latch, sat Richard Latham waiting for her.

## CHAPTER XX

### *Richard*

ANNE halted, frightened by Richard's face.

"Well, dear?" he said, and extended his hand.

She came on slowly, fear clutching her and a sense of guilt. When she reached the bench Richard lightly clasped the hand that she laid in his and drew her down beside him.

"Did you have a pleasant walk, dear?" he asked. He spoke quietly, but his voice was strained.

Anne did not speak and Richard turned toward her.

"Are you tired, brave little woman? And aren't you going to tell me all about it?"

"Richard, what has happened?" cried Anne. "What can have happened since I left you so light-hearted, so happy, so boyish? Are you ill? You aren't ill?"

"No, dear, but I grew old," said Richard. "Tell me about it, Anne; don't be afraid to trust me. Do you think I could blame you, sweet, or want anything but your dearest desire?"

"Oh, Richard, Richard, who has wounded you, what has happened?" cried Anne again. "Who has been here?"

"No one has been here but little Anne," said Richard.

"Ah, little Anne!" She caught her breath. "There was nothing for me to tell you, Richard, dearest, but—what has she told you?"

"Little Anne's perception, though limited by lack of full understanding, is truer than yours, dear. Little Anne had heard it said that it was not fair to me, so she came to put her

knowledge into my hands, actuated by her extreme conscientiousness and without consulting her elders. So she acted directly and properly, as children will. It was true that it was not fair to me, dear Anne! But that little Anne came to me I might have gone on and made you wretched, you whom of all the world I most want to make happy! You see, dear girl, this was not fair to me; little Anne was right. I am not a dragon, devouring maidens, least of all this dear maid! And now aren't you ready to tell me all about it? Tell me as if I were your brother. What did you say to Kit to-day? Did you promise him to come to me and tell me how dearly you loved him? He is a fine lad, dear!"

"Oh, Richard, Richard!" moaned Anne. "Oh, Richard, the lion-hearted!"

"Come, that's better than to be a dragon, though the lion's share is supposed to be formidable! Anne, dear, you, being you, do not need to be told that to love means to desire the good of the person beloved. When is Kit——Did you promise Kit to tell me what might have been the sad story, but now is to be a happy one?" asked Richard.

"I told Kit that I would not see him again till he and I were cured of this unhappy love. It will be cured, Richard! Trust me; I shall love my husband and no one else!" Anne cried.

"Surely. You will not turn from Kit, your husband! Do you imagine that I think of you as fickle, playing with love, my dear?" said Richard.

"Not Kit, not Kit my husband; you, you, Richard!" cried Anne, wildly. "Kit saw it as I did. He couldn't see it so at first, because he is undisciplined. It is natural to take what you want if you can snatch it. But he did see, and he willingly laid down his—no; he had no claim to lay down—he willingly admitted your claim. And he has said good-bye to me, Richard, and is gone, wholly, completely gone out of my life. Don't say,

don't think I deceived you! How could I tell you? I knew you would send me away. And I want to stay. I'm going to marry you, Richard, best and most unselfish of men; you, not Kit Carrington; no one but you, only you!"

"Dear Anne," began Richard with an effort that Anne was sobbing too hard to see, "you cannot marry me, my beloved, because I will not marry you! See to what shocking lengths you drive me! I am blind, indeed, for I did not for an instant suspect that you loved Kit. Thank heaven little Anne healed that form of blindness! I have often felt that you did not fully love me, dear, but I set down much of your reserve to your natural reticence, your innate shrinking from a lover's arms. I knew that a great love, such as mine was for you, would rise at flood and break down such barriers, but, though I saw that you did not love me like that, I thought that you loved me so much that the tide of it would rise to its flood in you. I loved to think that I should write my name on this white page indelibly. I did not dream that you loved someone else. This justifies me, so forgive me, Anne, for the pain I stupidly caused you."

"Richard, kill me if you must, but not with such words!" cried Anne, turning to hide her face in her hands on the back of the garden bench. "Will you not listen to me? I want to marry you. I want to marry you! And you were right; I shall love you best. Just as now I hold you higher than any one else, so I shall love you best. I have never for an instant thought of breaking my word to you. I had no more idea of Kit's feeling for me than you had. Nor did I realize that I cared for him. It was a strange revelation of unsuspected feeling on both sides that overtook us. I have not listened to him, have not dallied with this madness. And Kit is honourable. He was tempted to take his own good, but he is a man. When he considered, he knew that it must be you, not he.

He is gone, gone forever. Time will cure him. He has done right and I've no fear but that he will be happy. So let us try to put it out of our minds; let us pretend that we had an ugly dream. We are awake now; the dream is over. Richard, dearest Richard, forgive me! Can't you forgive me and let the dream go by?"

"Anne, child, yes; the dream shall go by! But my dream, which was truly a dream; not your reality," said Richard, gently taking her hands and drawing her head on his shoulder. "Cry here, faithful true Anne, for I am Richard, your brother. But never Richard, your husband! Nothing this world could offer me, nothing that you could say, would make me marry you, dearest of all women! Consider for a moment: you who are so honourable, so eager to uphold the honour of Kit, whom you love, would you have me marry one whom I knew loved and wanted someone else? Would you? It is beyond possibility. It is best for us both that we never again remotely approach to a suggestion that this might be possible. I tell you again what I have already told you: I am profoundly grateful to little Anne Berkley for averting the horrible tragedy, the dreadful mistake I came near making. Sooner or later I should have found you out, dear, and I'm not sure that I shouldn't have died of it! So let us be thankful that I was one of little Anne's beetles and that she set me on my feet to run away in time! Now it is all settled, dear one, and we are tired. I am going into the house. Don't come just now, Anne."

Richard arose unsteadily, at the end of his endurance, exhausted by his effort.

Anne looked up at him with the wet eyes of a chastised child.

"Mayn't I work for you? Oh, I can't! Oh, Richard, let me marry you and work for you!" she begged.

"The forbidden subject so soon!" Richard held up a rebuking hand. "There is no work; I shall not work for a long time. The

play is done; your play that you made. Don't you think we would better send for Wilberforce?"

"Oh, yes; surely he must come! Will you send for him, or shall I?" Anne cried, eagerly.

"I'll telegraph him when I go into the house," said Richard. "Go now, and try to rest, dear. It has been a cruel afternoon for you. Why not go to Joan Paul and get her to take you in? You should not be alone in a boarding-house. And, Anne, one last word! You spoke of forgiving you a few moments ago; surely you know that there is not the least thing to forgive? You have been so true, so fine, so kind that all my life I shall have you before my eyes, the ideal woman who quite simply, at any cost, does what is right, not what is pleasantest, easiest. That is rare, my child, in man or woman, and I'm grateful to have known you. And remember, Anne, the sooner I hear that you are happy, the sooner I shall throw off my sense of guilt for having been so dull as to accept your mercy upon a blind man."

Richard bent and took Anne's hands in his, laying them, palms upward, in his own hands. He kissed first one then the other cold little palm and closed the fingers over the kisses, as one plays with a child.

"That is your freedom, in your own hands, dear, and good-bye," he said.

He went unsteadily up the path, stooping, then remembered, and straightened himself, throwing back his head. Anne watched him go, her hands upon her knees, her fingers still closed tight over the palms in which Richard had deposited his tender dismissal and farewell. When he had gone she sat for a few moments with bowed head and closed eyes. Then she, too, arose and left the lovely garden by its low side gate. She went miserably to her room on her return to the boarding-house. She threw herself on her bed and lay staring out of the window,

disregarding the summons to dinner. There was but one definite thought in her mind. Now, whatever happened, she must never marry Kit. When he learned that Richard had refused to let her fulfil her promise to him, of course Kit would jubilantly come to carry her off. But Anne felt that for her and Kit to be happy when Richard was lonely and wretched would be past bearing. She was not capable of reasoning now; her very muscles seemed to ache with pity for Richard and with groundless self-reproach. She had no desire to summon Joan; she was one with little Anne in a desire to do penance.

Little Anne, like most children of her type, had a retro-active conscience; it was especially likely to bother her at night.

This night as bedtime approached she reflected that she had gone to see Mr. Latham without consulting her mother, and that she had told him something that her mother had forbidden her to mention to any one. To be sure the actuating cause of her going was an addition to the events of that morning when Anne and Kit had met in her home; the conversation at Joan's had seemed to her to free her from the obligation of silence, had imposed an obligation to speak; but now, at night, the more she considered, the surer she became that it had been wrong to go to Mr. Latham to set him right without her mother's consent. It was done past mending, to be sure, but little Anne was well-trained in the duty of confessing her faults. Therefore, as the summer dusk deepened, she crept into her mother's arms and with heavy sighs told the story of her afternoon.

She had not been prepared for her mother's extreme perturbation over the tale. Mrs. Berkley became tense with excitement and asked so many questions as to the effect of it upon Mr. Latham that after little Anne had described how gay she had found him; how tired and still he seemed when she had left him; all that he had said, exactly what little Anne had said to him, the child was too sleepy to feel properly contrite. Her

mother told her that she had done wrong to take upon herself interference in older people's affairs, especially to disobey her mother, but little Anne went to bed forgiven and made peaceful by her mother's kiss. She fell asleep instantly, infolded by the sense of a world in which everything came right.

When little Anne was tucked away, Mrs. Berkley hastened to the telephone.

"Oh, Joan," her husband heard her say, "do go right around to find Anne Dallas! Yes. I don't know, I'm *sure*! No, not ill. Well, I'm afraid so. Anne has been calling this afternoon. Can't you guess? I'm afraid to tell you over the wire. Yes, that's better; she'll tell you. That's right, dearie. Do hurry. Good-night; kiss the baby for me."

Mrs. Berkley hung up and turned her perturbed face upon her laughing husband.

"*Dea ex machina* again?" he asked. "Takes some machine to stand up under our small daughter's driving, Barbara! It's my impression that the machine of this particular goddess is a high-geared racing car!"

Mr. Berkley's tone expressed the father's pride in a clever child, the father who leaves the guidance of that cleverness to the mother, and as to his share of it enjoys it as a comedy.

Joan hurried to Antony.

"Come, Tony," she said. "Mother just called up; we've got to go around to Anne Dallas's boarding place. Mother didn't like to tell me what has happened—you know on this party line the receivers are positively restless when one talks!—but little Anne has been visiting. I'm sure it was Mr. Latham! I'd be willing to wager anything that she's told him about Anne and Kit—as much as she knows, and no human being could state how much that was! I haven't had a moment's peace—when I recalled it—since Kit was here and little Anne had baby over in the corner while we talked. She looked so

perfectly unconscious that I'm sure she was paying strict attention to what we said! Well, come on, Antony; Anne is in some sort of trouble."

"Gracious, what it is to have young friends who are in love and a young sister who is a busybody!" Antony pretended to grumble, but he went readily enough.

Joan left her husband on the boarding-house piazza, where he sat in awkward silence among observant strangers, with Guard's head between his knees, while Joan ran up to Anne's room.

"Oh, Joan, how good to see you! Richard told me to call you, but I couldn't," cried Anne, rising on one elbow as Joan dropped down beside her and took the girl in her arms, instantly overwhelmed with pity as she saw the misery in Anne's tear-stained face.

"That little Anne!" exclaimed Joan. "Tell me what happened. I think I know: little Anne has told Richard Latham our secret!"

"And he has been so heavenly good to me; so generous, tender, that there are no words for it, Joan," Anne confirmed her. "I saw Kit this afternoon. We had parted forever, and when I came back from that walk there was Richard! He will not marry me, Joan! I begged him to marry me, and truly I could be peacefully content to marry him, but he will not listen to it. Oh, Joan, he is so lonely and so fine!"

"He is all of that! I already know it, and some time you will tell me how he proved it anew this afternoon. He couldn't marry you, dear! It would be horrid to accept such a sacrifice, now that he knows. Try to trust that things will come out better than you fear. Little Anne is not usually disobedient. Perhaps she has been an instrument of Providence. Did you have any dinner? Ah, I knew it! You are coming to make me a visit, so get together what you need for the night. We'll

come around here in the morning and get what you need for as many weeks as you'll stay. Baby will be such a comfort to you! I'll let her come into your bed in the morning. She's the sweetest thing in bed! Antony is downstairs, waiting for us, with Guard. Come, Anne, hurry! Antony hates to sit on a piazza, among boarding women! Where's your kit—— Oh, Anne, please! I didn't mean—I mean your bag! And a nightie and toothbrush, your brush and comb. You'll be fed at my house."

Joan fluttered about gathering up the articles she enumerated. Anne was swept along, powerless to resist the loving kindness that launched her out of her swamp of despairing lethargy into a tide of action that implied hope.

Antony behaved with the utmost decorum, not betraying that he saw anything unusual in Anne's disfigured face nor in her unexpected visit. Guard thrust his nose into Anne's hand; Joan held tight to her arm, all the while talking her friendly, inconsequent talk which had in it more method than was apparent on the surface. Better than any eloquence it expressed sympathy; what was more, it carried with it the conviction that life was not wholly sad, nor its troubles irremediable.

Joan herself got Anne a dainty meal of the sort that can be eaten after crying has worn out appetite and digestion. The tea was perfectly drawn and Anne felt better for it.

Joan let the girl peep at sleeping Barbara before she took her into the cool, restful guest chamber, and tucked her into bed. She laughed the while at herself, saying she was like little Anne, and loved to play house, but none the less she knew precisely what the lonely, discouraged girl needed. Then she traced a tiny cross on Anne's forehead, kissed her, and said:

"Good-night. God bless you, dear! That's what Mother

always said and did to us. I always knew that was why I slept so sweetly and so safe. Go to sleep at once, Anne, dear," said Joan as she left her.

An hour later she was gratified to find, when she peeped in, that Anne was sleeping sweetly under her good-night blessing.

Antony was removing his collar when Joan came into their room. He smiled quizzically at her in the glass.

"Confess!" he said. "You love to have your friends in trouble so you can cosset them!"

"Oh, no. Shame on you, Antony Paul! But I do love to cosset them when they are in trouble, which is not the same thing in the least!" Joan defended herself. "This is not a little trouble. Mr. Latham must be desolate. Dear, splendid Mr. Latham! And how Anne can ever bring herself to be happy with Kit, knowing it, is beyond me."

"I grant you all you like on the Latham side of it. He must be hard hit and it's a bad matter, that's sure. But as to Anne and Kit—poppycock, Madam Sentimentalia! The idea of an old matron like you talking such nonsense! What shall we give them, silver or glass? And here's this to consider, Joan: As a matter of economy of unhappiness, there are two happy by this arrangement, one unhappy. I'm no end sorry about Latham, but that seems to economize pain. Perhaps his unhappiness is durable and deep enough to throw out my arithmetic. Well, however it works, we've no hand in it, though apparently my sister-in-law had!" Antony laughed, and added: "I've got to go back downstairs; I left my watch on the table."

When Antony was going back for his forgotten watch Minerva was softly closing the door of Miss Carrington's room.

"Miss Carrington, I have news for you," she announced. "Mr. Latham's engagement to Miss Dallas is broken."

"Good heavens! Minerva, what makes you think so?" demanded Miss Carrington, swinging her feet to the floor and sitting erect on her couch.

"I *know* so," Minerva corrected her. "I have been to the movies with Mrs. Lumley. This afternoon the Berkley child was there. Mr. Latham was hoity-toity when she came. He's been that way lately, Mrs. Lumley says; tickled to death his play's done, and happy over being engaged. Well, when little Anne left he sat alone on the garden bench for the longest time, looking about killed; just limp and half dead. Then in comes Miss Dallas and they talked. You could see from the house it was serious, Mrs. Lumley says. Then Miss Dallas cried on his shoulder and he treated her like she had a broken bone, or her last, final sickness on her. At last he kissed her hands; kind of like a deathbed scene, Mrs. Lumley said it was. She was in the dining room, but it has those magnesia blinds you can turn, so she saw it all plain. Then Mr. Latham came into the house, and after a little Miss Dallas went away. Mrs. Lumley didn't see her go, because she went back into the pantry when Mr. Latham came in, and went on with her mayonnaise. Not that she needed to; he went right on up to his room. He didn't come to dinner, nor would he let Stetson take up a tray; nothing but coffee later on. So it's surely broken. Mrs. Lumley says there's no more doubt of it than of the laws of the needs of Prussians. I thought you'd better know."

"What can have happened? It sounds like a renunciation as you describe it," murmured Miss Carrington. "Kit has been strange lately. He walked about last night for ages. I tapped on his door and begged him to go to bed, but he only put on slippers and still prowled; it was really worse, for the padded sound is more annoying than a louder one. To-night at dinner he was absolutely silent and colourless. I was going to ask what was wrong, but reflected that a boy hates to have

ill-health noticed. He can't endure Mr. Lanbury; he was dining here, but it was more than that. I do wonder——" Miss Carrington stopped.

"So did I, and so do I, Miss Carrington," said Minerva. "It sort of looks—— Yet why? And you see little Anne Berkley comes into it there. Mr. Latham was gay till she came and what could she——?" Minerva talked with elisions.

"Kit goes to the Berkleys' a great deal, and that child misses very little that happens, or is said where she is," commented Miss Carrington. "Minerva, I hope and pray that engagement is not broken! If it is—no matter if Helen is lost to him, Kit shall not marry a nobody, without family, money, beauty—beyond considerable sweet prettiness! He shall *not*!"

"As to that, Miss Carrington, it's hard to say what will happen in a world like this where promises mean nothing, and there's no principle. Once I, myself, had the promise of a real nice-mannered man, and gave my own to him, but here I am and have been these twenty years gone! One thing more Mrs. Lumley told me: She said Mr. Latham had telegraphed Mr. Wilberforce to come on as quick's he conveniently could."

"Mr. Wilberforce! It was he got that situation for Anne Dallas! It looks as though she might have seriously displeased Mr. Latham that he sends for the one responsible for her being there! Well, well, Minerva, I'm truly afraid that the engagement is broken."

Miss Carrington arose with a long sigh to put herself into Minerva's hands to be made ready for the night.

"Oh, there's no mistake about it, Miss Carrington. Mrs. Lumley is a good deal of a lump, but when it comes to things like that, when she looks she sees, whether it's behind blinds or close by. I thought you'd find comfort in Mr. Wilberforce's coming, having the hope that Miss Dallas had done something

she'd better not have done. Otherwise, I'm free to confess, I think the chance of your holding back Mr. Kit is pretty slender."

Minerva pulled her mistress's shoulder snaps open viciously as she spoke. She was troubled by Miss Carrington's recent failure in health, but she dearly liked to suggest that Kit might foil her.

## CHAPTER XXI

### *Wilberforce, the Painter*

**B**IBIANA, little Anne's former nurse, answered the telephone call.

"This is Mr. Latham. May I speak to Miss Berkley?" said the voice at the other end of the wire.

"Do you want Mrs. Paul, that was Miss Joan?" asked Bibiana.

"I want Miss Berkley, Miss Anne Berkley, please," Richard insisted, and Bibiana turned away with a grunt. "Just little Anne! Anne, come and speak to Mr. Latham. He's calling you," she added to the child who had fallen into the habit of loitering at hand when the telephone bell rang, in the faint hope of getting a chance to talk over the wire.

"Mr. Latham wants me to come to see him!" cried little Anne after a brief and, on her part, chuckling telephone conversation. "Please, Mother dear, mayn't I?"

"Why, yes. He must be lonely," Mrs. Berkley hesitated. "But don't—well, there's no use in trying to forestall your speeches, Anne! I suppose you can't do any more harm—or was it good? Run along, dear, but first show me your hands and let me brush your hair."

Neat and decorous, little Anne presented herself in the Latham Street house. Richard looked ill, but he smiled at the child, welcoming her warmly.

"It's only a ceremonial call; we aren't going to play anything, little Anne," he said. "Do you mind chatting? I felt the need of you, my dear."

Quick little Anne caught the note in his voice. She always stood in awe of the poet, rarely was as perfectly at ease with him as with her other adult friends, but now she ran to him and bestowed herself on the arm of his chair and put her arm around his neck, her cheek on his head, as if he were Peter in trouble.

"I think it's most fun of anything to talk when people will talk sensible and int'resting," she said.

"I'll try, Anne," Richard said, weakly. "Do you think that by any chance Anne in your case stands for Anomaly?"

"No, just Anne," said little Anne. "When I'm confirmed I shall take some splendid name for my second one. When I was small I used to think I'd take Ursula, but now sometimes I think Emerentiana; it's so—so—nobody has it."

"Poor Nobody!" said Richard, falling into his habit of playing with little Anne. "Pretty hard on her to have that name! Where did you get hold of it?"

"She was a little girl stoned to death for being a Christian, in the catacombs," explained Anne. "They pegged rocks at her, those pagans! Don't you think it must have been awful to have lived in those times? Either you were a Christian and got killed, boiled in oil, and everything; or else you weren't, and were terribly wicked. And if you weren't a noble character you might wobble when you had to choose."

Unexpectedly to himself, Richard laughed.

"You might, indeed, little Anne! And I was right to invite you to see me. I thought you'd elevate me in mind and spirits! If you were older wouldn't you come here to help me with my work, read to me, and all that?"

"Like—like to!" Little Anne corrected herself with no small adroitness for a person of her age. "Do you suppose I could now? I've tried Peter-two's typewriter. It doesn't go fast with one finger, my way, and the letters get kind of snarled before each other and behind each other; not the way they ought

to stand in the word, but maybe if I practised lots! I can read 'most anything that isn't too queer subject's; reading never bothers me dreadfully. Maybe you'd spell the worst words?"

"I'll wait for you, little Anne!" promised Richard. "I'll have to have somebody else here while I'm waiting, but when you're older I'll toss her lightly out of the window and open the door for you, bowing deeply while you enter to take command of my typewriter, my books, my work, and me."

"Well," sighed little Anne, "I s'pose you have to wait! But I'll be eight in a little while and Mother says the older you grow the faster the years whisk by. After my birthday Christmas is awf'ly long coming, and it does seem a good while in winter before Easter, and the last part of school's kind of slow, but summer goes pretty fast. Maybe it won't seem so very, very long before I can help you?"

"It won't!" Richard assured her. "Especially if you come here a great deal in the meantime. Little Anne, is Miss Dallas with your sister?"

"Yes, she is," little Anne admitted, hesitantly. "She's right there."

"Is she well?" asked Richard.

"Not so very exactly," little Anne said, reluctantly. "But you can't be if you cry too much. It makes you feel as used up as anything to cry a great deal, *I* think."

"Oh, it does! Is Anne crying a great deal, little Anne? Will you tell her that I beg her to put me entirely out of her mind, and that I am going on well?" cried Richard.

"Well, yes, I will," little Anne said. "But I don't think it will stop her worrying over you. I heard her tell Joan that the poem I found just hunted her—or something; she meant she kept thinking about it."

"The poem you found? I don't know it, little Anne. Where did you find it? Why does it haunt her?" asked Richard.

"Upstairs in your hall, quite long ago; about Fourth of July time. A poem you'd written yourself. It was sort of hard for Anne to read it. She thought first she had to copy it; then she didn't. She made me put it back just 'xactly where I found it," little Anne explained.

Richard gasped and fell back in his chair.

"That!" he exclaimed. "You found that and showed it to Anne! And it was not long after that she came to me— Ah, now I understand, now I understand! That was how she knew! She tried so hard, dear little soul, she tried so hard to make me happy! I never quite saw why she acted as she did till now. Little Anne, little Anne, you have played an important part in my life. You have endowed me and impoverished me. I don't see why it all had to be, but I've no doubt that I shall some day. Now tell me something else: Do you know whether Kit Carrington knows that Anne is with your sister, and that she will never marry me? For she never will, little Anne!"

"Oh, I know that!" cried little Anne. "I don't know whether Kit does or not. Want me to tell him?"

Richard almost smiled; a gleam of amusement went over his unhappy face.

"Always ready to turn another beetle!" he said. "On the whole, yes, little Anne. Tell him all that you know. It will be told in a better way than if it were clearer. Anne will complete the story. And tell Kit that I asked you to tell him. Tell him that I am anxious to hear that Anne has stopped crying and is smiling at him. Tell him just that. And that I send him my blessing—will you, dear?"

"Yes," said little Anne. "I'll tell him to-day. He's been to our house 'bout twice each day since Anne's been at Joan's. Anne won't let him come there, nor she won't send him one word, not even on the telephone by me. Joan told her she'd shake her, maybe, 'cause what was the use of being mis'ble

every way? I'll tell Kit, Mr. Latham. And, Mr. Latham, there's a quite tall, thin man coming in here. He's got a bag. Maybe he's a Mormon mish'nary; they do come like that. This one doesn't look like one, though; he's much nicer. He's got a brown moustache, and a flat, boxy thing, and a bag."

"Wilberforce!" cried Richard, starting up so violently that he nearly upset little Anne.

That did not halt him. Leaving little Anne to take care of her equilibrium, he rushed into the hall, seized the newcomer by the lapel of his coat and cried, joyously:

"Ted, dear old man, how did you make it so soon?"

"Message came just in time for me to make the last train that connected to get me here to-day," said Ted. "You look like the mischief, Dick! What has happened that you sent for me in such urgent haste?"

"I'll tell you the whole story later. It is Anne and I; that's enough for now. We've given it all up, Ted, fortunately," said Richard.

"Fortunately? Well, you don't look it! What's Anne been doing? I know she never went back on anything in her life. So what have you been doing? Though that's as fool a question as the other," said Edwin Wilberforce, frowning.

"Ted, I can't talk about it now. Anne was only sorry for me, and I discovered in time the cruel task she had put upon her blessed little self. That's all. Have you eaten? Stetson, Stetson, here's Mr. Wilberforce already! Order him a lunch, will you?" Richard called out of the rear door in the hall. Then he brought his friend into his library, taking his hat and bags, fussing over him with an affection that eloquently told of the relation between the poet and the painter.

"Well, of all things! Where did you find the little girl? I never heard of her," exclaimed Ted, amazed by the apparition of

little Anne sitting stiffly, her hands clasped in her lap, her feet crossed at the ankles, on the arm of Richard's chair.

"This is Miss Anne Berkley, Mr. Wilberforce," said Richard with a gesture of courtly dignity for little Anne's benefit. "She is an intimate friend of mine who visits me often, with whom I play happily, who will some day, she promises, when enough time has passed, come to be eyes to me and help me to write poems and plays. She is a lady who has a vocation which she herself discovered, and which proved to be more significant as a prophecy than she foresaw. Her vocation, she one day announced to her mother, is setting beetles on their feet when they lie, helpless, on their backs. I have been one of her beetles, as I'll explain by and by. She goes to a convent school, and is in many ways mediæval. She is one of a delightful family, Catholics of the right sort. Anne is staying now with this little Anne's lovable young matron sister, Mrs. Antony Paul. And that is enough of the History of Queen Anne the Less, isn't it, little Anne?"

"It is quite a lot," she agreed. "Shall I go home now? I'll come again."

"Would you mind shaking hands, Miss Little-Anne?" asked Edwin Wilberforce, stooping from his great height to carry out his suggestion. "I wish you would take me for another friend of yours. I can play games and the jews'-harp! When you hear me play Wagner on the jews'-harp you will be proud that you know me."

Little Anne looked up at him with dancing eyes. She did not know Wagner, but she did know the jews'-harp.

"I can play on blades of grass perfec'ly wonderful," she said.

"You'll do!" shouted Ted Wilberforce. "We'll have duets. Say, Miss Little-Anne, I'd like to paint you! Seated in a chair with a high, carved back, clad in a long, straight green gown falling to your feet, and having a nice little, tight little white yoke-

top with a band around your throat; your hair straight and ribbonless on each side of your thin little face, and in your hands, resting on your knees, a fine old tooled "Book of Hours" which I own! I'd call the picture—call it—The Mystic! That's it! With that face and those eyes, visions just beyond, eh, Dick?"

"You've got her," agreed Richard. "Will you sit, little Anne?"

"Do you paint people?" inquired little Anne. "I thought you put cows in your pictures. Mr. Latham has a lovely, still field with a cow in it; he said you painted it."

"*Still* field! Fair for adjectives, eh, Dick?" cried Ted, delighted. "I assure you, Miss Little-Anne, that I also paint portraits. Will you sit to me?"

"I'd perfec'ly love it!" said little Anne. "But I never was pretty; I was always dark and thin. I thought sitters were pretty. I have a niece who is the prettiest child in all the world. She's so fat and pink she has to dimple. I never was a fas'nating child like Barbara, but if you'd like to paint my picture I'd be so pleased I couldn't say it. And there's one thing, I can sit as still!"

"Then that's settled! And when you sit to me we shall chat all the time, and possibly we shall let Mr. Latham come to help us talk. I'm going to stay awhile; we'll meet often, I hope. Good-bye, Miss Little-Anne."

Ted Wilberforce shook hands again with little Anne; plainly he had capitulated to her at once.

Little Anne put her arms around Richard's neck and kissed him hard.

"Good-bye, dear; I shall pray for you lots, for you're really quite pale," she whispered.

"The dear little saintly old lady!" cried Ted, who had caught the whisper and was watching little Anne away with amusement, that was not wholly amusement.

Miss Carrington on this morning had encountered Kit in a mood that she did not recognize. She had spoken to him of the broken engagement between Richard Latham and Anne Dallas. She found that Kit was prepared to announce to her, not the accomplished fact, but his resolution that his own engagement to Anne Dallas would soon follow this break.

"Do I know what caused this break between Miss Dallas and Mr. Latham? Certainly I do, Aunt Anne. Mr. Latham learned that Miss Dallas and I love each other. We had agreed that she must fulfil her promise to Mr. Latham, but, naturally, he wouldn't marry a girl who loved another man! Like the honourable man that he is he renounced his own happiness for hers. Anne won't see me yet; she is miserably unhappy about Latham, but she will see me, and it won't be long before I introduce my wife to you, Aunt Anne," said Kit.

"I hope so, but you won't introduce Anne Dallas to me as your wife," Miss Carrington had answered, instantly in a towering rage as she recognized in Kit a determination that made him at once a man to be reckoned with. At the same time her own, new physical weakness was more perceptible as her temper rose.

"Christopher Carrington, I will not consent to your marriage to that girl! Nothing against her personally, but she is fortuneless, nameless, no family, no anything! Never!"

"Nonsense, Aunt Anne! Please don't talk foolishly," said Kit, and left her almost choking in enraged surprise that Kit had dared to dismiss her as ridiculous.

By the afternoon Miss Carrington had regained her self-command, and with it her usual cunning. It was notorious that love was whetted by opposition; she must try in some other way to circumvent Kit. She discussed the situation with Helen Abercrombie, who heartlessly laughed at her.

"Try everything you can think of, Miss Carrington! By all

means see Anne Dallas and convey to her the harm she'd do Kit if she married him against your will; that you can punish him roundly. But it's my candid opinion that you would do yourself less harm lying down and reading a problem novel, and just as much affect Kit's silly determination. The conclusion I've reached during this visit in regard to Kit is that he knows his own mind," Helen said.

Nevertheless, Miss Carrington summoned Minerva to array her in her most impressive calling costume, and to order Noble to have the car around at half-past four that she might solicitously inquire after Anne Dallas's welfare, having heard that she was not well.

"No kind of use in it, Miss Carrington," Minerva remarked, getting down to lace her mistress's shoes. She did not specify what was useless, but Miss Carrington was depressed by this identity of view on the part of two such keen women as Helen and Minerva.

On the way to Antony Paul's house Miss Carrington met Edwin Wilberforce walking alone toward the station. She bade Noble stop, and greeted the artist cordially.

"Delighted you are here, Mr. Wilberforce! I am anxious about Mr. Latham. Won't you get in?" she said.

"No, thanks. I'm going down to look up some canvases I sent ahead; they ought to be here. I hope you are well, Miss Carrington?"

"Not altogether. I am too old to be bothered, and I am bothered." Miss Carrington spoke with an effect of involuntary frankness. "My foolish nephew is troubling me, has fixed his silly will on a poor girl. Mr. Latham also was attracted by her, and for him she would have been excellent. He needs just her patient devotion; she is sweet and refined in manner. But Kit has his name to make; Mr. Latham's name would cover his wife's lack. I believe you recommended this girl to our poet.

She's a nice little creature, but a penniless, nameless wife would be a fatal mistake for Kit."

Edwin Wilberforce was regarding the old lady with an expression that she was too engrossed to see. When she paused he laughed and said:

"Oh, well, I'm prejudiced, but I think Wilberforce is not a bad name."

Miss Carrington stared at the irrelevancy of this remark.

"But surely! Who could doubt it? Not only in itself, but when borne by a famous artist! However, I really can't see what that has to do with Anne Dallas and my troubles."

This time Wilberforce stared. Then he laughed, and said:

"Oh, don't you? That's rather good fun, Miss Carrington! But Dallas is a good name, too, though if your nephew married Miss Dallas the honourable name of Carrington would engulf it."

He raised his hat and walked on, somewhat unceremoniously, leaving the old lady to puzzle over his queer speech.

Miss Carrington was met by Joan with Barbara clinging unsteadily to her skirt.

"Thank you, Miss Carrington; Miss Dallas is well, rather tired. She is on the side piazza, in a steamer chair, having a beautiful time reading and resting. Will you go there? It is cooler to-day than the front piazza."

Anne looked frail and sweet as Joan led Miss Carrington toward her. Her face and gown were both colourless; her great dark eyes, her masses of satin-smooth dark hair contrasted sharply with their setting.

"Oh, Miss Carrington!" Anne exclaimed, springing to her feet; she was no longer pale.

"Dear little Miss Dallas, I hope that you are better?" said Miss Carrington in her cool voice, with its clear-cut, Italian-like articulation. "I am so extremely sorry about this disaster and

for you, enmeshed in it, that I have come to tell you so. Besides, my dear, I want to know you better and I truly think it may be well for you to know me."

"I will not dispute the latter clause, Miss Carrington," said Anne, pulling forward a chair and motioning Miss Carrington into her abandoned steamer chair. She smiled as she spoke, and Kit's aunt admitted to herself the charm of Anne's face and manner, the irresistible attraction of her voice. "You are kind to be so sympathetic to me. I am unhappy. I am horrified to know that I have given Mr. Latham pain."

"Surely, you would be. It is most unfortunate. Don't you think that after a time, perhaps a long time, you will be able to convince him that there is no obstacle between you?" suggested Miss Carrington. Anne turned and looked at her intently.

"Why, no, Miss Carrington," she said after a brief pause.

"Dear child, I must be frank with you." Miss Carrington spoke gently as if to soften her effect. "You fancy that you are fond of my boy; he is quite sure that he is fond of you. Doubtless you are both right—for the time being. But men do not die of love now any more than when Polonius went to that reversed supper. Kit will get over his fancy, sweet as you are, and so will you recover from yours, fine as the boy is. As to that, even my partiality cannot see that Kit surpasses Richard Latham! Though I sincerely admire you, I will never consent to your marriage with Kit! He is to make his name in the world, as I told you when I spoke of him to you several weeks ago. He has allowed the marriage that I meant him to make to slip through his fingers. You naughty, pretty child, I wonder what share you had in that? But there are plenty of opportunities for a personable man like Kit to marry advantageously. You have no money, no social position. Pardon me, Miss Dallas, but we must deal with facts. It is my duty to see that Kit gets one or both of these things in marrying. I applaud your

sense in refusing to see Kit since your engagement to Mr. Latham was broken. Let me beg you to continue to refuse to see him! I am sure you are too noble a girl to spoil his life. Whatever nonsense Kit talks about love as a compensation for more solid, more enduring good, it is perfectly true that if you married him you would spoil his life. I should alter my plans for him, and he would have a pittance, whereas, if he pleases, he will have wealth."

Miss Carrington paused for a reply, but Anne, who had made no move to interrupt her long discourse, still did not speak. She was paler than she had been when Miss Carrington arrived, and she was at once wishing that Joan would come to her rescue, and dreading that she might come and speak her mind to this formidable old lady.

As Anne remained silent, Miss Carrington spoke again:

"I met Mr. Latham's friend, Mr. Wilberforce——"

"Oh, has he come!" Anne interrupted her with a glad cry.

"Yes," Miss Carrington showed surprise. "And knowing that he is Mr. Latham's close friend I said to him practically what I've said to you. I think he agreed with my estimate of the value of a family name, for he—somewhat irrelevantly—said that Wilberforce was a distinguished name."

Unexpectedly Anne laughed, much as Wilberforce had laughed.

"Did you say all this to him? Yes, the Wilberforces are all reverent to their family," she said, her eyes dancing.

Miss Carrington drew herself up; she did not intend that this young person should find her amusing.

"One would infer from that remark your acquaintance with the Wilberforce family," she said.

Again Anne laughed.

"Yes, I know the Wilberforces rather intimately; my mother was one of them. She and Edwin Wilberforce's father were sister and brother," she said.

"What!" cried Miss Carrington, half rising.

"Dear Miss Carrington, don't mind! I don't, and it will only amuse Ted. He and I have an indecorous sense of humour. Isn't it funny, really? I see dear old Ted coming down the street this minute," cried Anne.

Miss Carrington rose fully this time and positively ran away. She was not often placed, and by herself, at a disadvantage; she was not minded to face two pairs of dark eyes dancing with that "indecorous sense of humour."

Ted Wilberforce ran up the steps as Miss Carrington drove away.

He gathered Anne into his arms, crying:

"Dear little white Nancy, what sort of mischief have you been up to? Poor kid! Hard luck all around to be so sweet a thing that everyone loves you! Don't cry, little Coz! I won't beat you if you have hit my best friend hard and broken him all up; you couldn't help it, Anne, dear!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### *Exits and Entrances*

MISS CARRINGTON'S dignified house was shaken out of its settled monotony.

Helen Abercrombie was going home. Her father, the ex-governor, was coming for her; he was to pass a night under his old friend's roof, and then resume his way, taking with him his handsome daughter to entertain for him guests of political importance. George Lanbury had arranged to travel with them. He had stayed on at the Cleavedge Arms to receive formally the ex-governor's acceptance of him as his future son-in-law.

Miss Carrington herself was decidedly shaken in health; her nerves were on edge, her digestion a misnomer, and her heart was acting badly.

It had been a trial almost beyond bearing that Kit had laughed at her attempt to control his marriage—had good-humouredly, but decidedly, flouted her hint of punishment for disobeying her or reward for his obedience. She had for so long been ensconced behind her pride and paramount will that it was a disintegrating shock to discover that she might be regarded merely as one of the many prejudiced elderly women in the world whose prejudices should be kindly tolerated as long as they affected nothing in particular, but which were to be put down when they overflowed this barrier.

She raged to discover that Kit considered her views silly whims, that the worst that she could do to him was a featherweight in

comparison with Anne Dallas; most unbearable of all, that her rage accomplished nothing but to throw her into greater impotence.

Kit had brought Helen's father from the station; he went down with Noble to meet him.

The ex-governor was a man of soldierly bearing, with keen eyes, a drooping white moustache, useful in concealing the expression of his lips, and thick, prematurely white hair. Helen looked like him. His face was not less that of a citizen of the world than hers, but something—years or nature—modified in him the hardness that impaired his daughter's beauty.

Kit ushered ex-Governor Abercrombie into the library and went in search of his aunt. He returned to say:

"My aunt, as I told you, Mr. Abercrombie, is not well. She begs you to allow her one more hour of rest before coming down. Helen is driving with Mr. Lanbury. Shall I take you to your room, or would you rather sit here? Smoking is not forbidden in my aunt's house. May I?" Kit offered Mr. Abercrombie his cigar case.

"I'll wait here till Helen comes. I suppose Lanbury will return with her? I'd like to bless them personally as soon as possible; I have blessed them by telegraph and mail."

The ex-governor took a cigar, cut its tip, and looked at Kit with humorous eyes as he spoke.

"I'm told that you didn't want to marry my girl!" he continued, to Kit's chagrin. "Yet she's a handsome creature and clever. Helen conveys to me the impression that you understood that she and your aunt approved of your marrying her, but that you would rather have a certain pretty little person of whom their estimate is not high. Helen is emancipated; she would make her opinions clear to you, if I know her! She surely is a princess, and if you were my son I should have done everything possible to push your fortunes. What is the reason you

were so obdurate, Master Kit? As it's settled, you need not answer unless you wish. I'm simply curious."

Kit looked up with a frank laugh and a blush that pleased Helen's father.

"You see I loved Miss Dallas and didn't love your splendid Helen, Mr. Abercrombie," he said. "I suppose it does seem stupid to you, but wait till you see Miss Dallas! I think a man of your experience would admire her, and say she's a girl to love."

Mr. Abercrombie smiled down at the tip of his cigar as he knocked off its ashes with his little finger.

"I don't find your attitude blameworthy, Kit," he said.

He was silent for a moment, then he looked up with a shadow in his eyes.

"I had my dream, too, Christopher. I didn't marry the girl; perhaps it's as well, but there's always a lurking doubt about a lost joy. She was a mighty sweet, fine girl, with something in her charm I never saw in any other woman. I suppose that's common to all first love. I married well; wisely, don't you see? It was a comfortable marriage. But I'm not so sure wise marriages are always wholly wise. I'm not inclined to condemn you for following your star. In fact, it has delighted me to find you the man your boyhood promised you'd be. I was greatly pleased to learn how loyally you stood by your colours. I shall do my best to talk your aunt over to our side. Helen is the twentieth-century jewel, fit in every way to hold her own. But if you love your unambitious girl, go ahead and marry her, and tell the world and the flesh to go to the devil! I'll do what I can to help you to business success, so don't worry, Kit."

Kit had sat listening to this long speech, his extinct cigar forgotten in his hand, amazement growing at each word. When Mr. Abercrombie ended Kit cried:

"Why, Governor Abercrombie, what a trump you are! I'd

no idea you'd be sympathetic! Aunt Anne will listen to you, of course. But I'm going into business in New York, so I don't suppose you can help me to get rich—no end grateful just the same! It's enough if you can help me with Aunt Anne."

"Political influence reaches out farther than you may think, my boy; I'll get at your business in some way, trust me! I'd like to see Miss Dallas. Think it can be managed?" asked Mr. Abercrombie.

"She won't see me," Kit admitted, cheerfully. "But that's a temporary state of things. We shall be married soon, that's certain. I wonder—wouldn't it be a good thing to get Aunt Anne to ask her here? Her cousin, Edwin Wilberforce, the artist, is staying with his great friend, Mr. Latham. I wonder if Aunt Anne could be persuaded to ask Anne and her cousin here together? It's such a neat way out of a mess to ignore it with a casual invitation!"

"Wilberforce, the artist, her cousin?" Mr. Abercrombie looked so pleased that there could be no question of his sincere desire to smooth the course of this true love.

"If your aunt cares about connections there is glory in being Edwin Wilberforce's cousin! It seems to me, my boy, that we shall certainly have Miss Carrington pouring libations to Eros!"

Mr. Abercrombie found that it was easier to veto a state law than to alter the unwritten law of a woman's will. His stay was not long enough to bring Miss Carrington to the point of striking her colours. She would not gratify him by admitting the justice of the proposition which he laid before her.

Helen's kindly father left Cleavedge at two o'clock on the following day. At the informal dinner of the evening of his arrival Mr. Abercrombie had met and accepted Helen's future husband. Kit thought that it was not a wholly agreeable duty; several times he caught Mr. Abercrombie watching George Lanbury and scrutinizing Helen.

Helen was at her best beauty and brilliance. Lanbury was entirely sure of himself, treated her father with easy assurance and Kit with condescending amusement. Not only Kit, but also Helen's father, knew that he believed himself to have stolen the girl from Kit's longing arms and that Kit was suffering in consequence, though he succeeded in not wearing his heart upon the sleeve of either of these defrauded limbs.

"Helen will put it all over him, but he will not always be pleasant," thought the astute father. "She was right to want this gallant boy."

The next day Miss Carrington was nervously anxious to have the hour of departure arrive; she was ill enough to want everything that was to happen to be quickly over and done. She did not attempt to go to the station, but bade Helen good-bye in her library. Helen lightly kissed Miss Carrington farewell. She was regal in her gray-green costume with its small hat, a touch of gold its sole ornament, risking comparison with her hair and losing by the venture.

"I've had a wonderful visit. You've been delightful to me, dear Miss Carrington," Helen said. "I hope you'll rest and regain your strength. Come to visit me when I'm settled down. That will not be for some time, but come when I am established. I'll be married at Christmas, if I can get things made by then. We may go abroad for the honeymoon; we have not settled our plans. But they will include a visit from you when I'm in my own house. Good-bye. Are you going to the station with us, nice Kit? That's dear of you! Parting *is* sweet sorrow, and this one will lead to a lovers' meeting, I trust. Tell your brown lass that I congratulate her, though custom reserves congratulations to the man. Come, Father, I'm ready."

"Good-bye, Miss Carrington. Get strong fast," said Helen's father, looking annoyed. "Think over my prescription. I'll guarantee your recovery if you follow it up. Good-bye."

Kit handed Helen into the car, put the bags in after Mr. Abercrombie, then got up beside Noble and they drove away. A good deal had happened since Helen had arrived. Kit realized that he was not the inexperienced boy who had greeted her.

No sooner were they gone than Miss Carrington hastened upstairs, calling as she reached the top:

"Minerva, Minerva, make haste!"

"I do not think that you should go, Miss Carrington," protested Minerva, ready with Miss Carrington's hat, coat, and gloves.

"Don't you? Did you order a carriage?" asked her mistress.

It appeared that Minerva had, though under protest, and Miss Carrington hurried her dressing. She bade the livery carriage driver to take her to Latham Street, and to wait.

Miss Carrington appeared unexpectedly in Richard's quiet room. She found him in his favourite chair, peacefully taking part in conversation with Ted Wilberforce and his sitter.

The sitter was little Anne, costumed as the artist had planned, in a soft green silken gown that fell to her ankles. It was touched with dull gold to relieve it, and it had a white yoke, and a narrow white band around the slender throat. Her dark hair fell straight against her cheeks, and her hands, lying on her knees, held a rare old tooled leather "Book of Hours." A dark carved chair of mediæval Italian design was her throne, and her little feet rested on a carved footstool. Her eyes were shining, for, to call into her face the expression that he wanted to paint, Ted Wilberforce had talked to her of poetry and of heavenly things.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Miss Carrington, stopping short.

She knew a great deal about pictures, and she saw that the picture before her was wonderfully beautiful, from both an artistic and a literary point of view.

"Don't let me interrupt, I beg," she said, delight shining in

her eyes. "When I lived in Paris I knew many of the artists and rejoiced in seeing pictures grow. But this one! Wilberforce or Carpaccio? And what do you call it?"

"The Mystic," Miss Carrington," said Wilberforce, resuming the brush that he had laid down.

The picture was well on toward completion; the artist worked rapidly, with swift, sure instinct and obedient strokes.

"Exactly!" Miss Carrington's approval of the name was manifest. "Little Anne, you are a fortunate child, yet I think you help the artist."

"Mr. Wilberforce has been telling me stories about Fra Angelico, and how he prayed and prayed to be fit to paint Our Lord and his Blessed Mother. And he told me about Fra Bartolomeo and how he went to the monastery where they attacked Sav-on-a-ro-la." Little Anne pronounced the long name carefully. "And it has been most good for me. 'Fra' means 'brother,' Miss Carrington. I'm afraid you don't know about monks, but I do. Sisters are the same, only ladies, and I go to their school. I told Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Latham lots of stories, too; all about St. Francis and the animals. He called them 'Brother Wolf' and 'Sister Bird,' and he loved them dearly! I don't know what he'd ever have done if he'd seen Kitca! Or Cricket! Do you think when they look down, saints can see animals? Don't you think they must, because they see me, and I'm always forever hugging Cricket and Kitca?"

Little Anne leaned forward eagerly, but instantly remembered and resumed her pose. Her eyes were filled with the vision that her own question called up, and Ted worked rapidly on the eyes in his picture.

"My dear little Anne, it seems to me quite as probable——" Miss Carrington checked herself. How could she insinuate her cavilling doubt to this child?

"I am certain that the saints see and love the creatures," she

said instead, to her own surprise. Then she turned to Richard with a gentleness that he had never before felt in her.

"And you, Mr. Latham? Are you well? Shall you stay with us in Clevedge next winter?" she asked.

"I am perfectly well, thank you, Miss Carrington," Richard said. "No, not Clevedge next winter. Ted Wilberforce and I are to foregather in New York; he has a studio there. He will paint; I shall write. We expect to have a sort of curtailed Parnassus; two of the Nine dwelling with us. Ted and I get on together, so the good old boy will take me in. We may go to Rome, but in the spring we'll be back here."

"I am truly delighted!" cried Miss Carrington, and she looked so. "That is perfect! Mr. Wilberforce, I want to beg your pardon. I did not know when I met you the other day that you were related to Miss Dallas. Will you do me a great favour and prove that I am forgiven? Will you bring your cousin to see me—to-day?"

Before Ted Wilberforce could answer, Richard interposed.

"Miss Carrington," he said, "permit me. You will admit my right to say this. I am thankful that you are making this overture. Will you go all the way and welcome Miss Dallas as your daughter? In all the world there is no other who would be to you what she would be. I shall be grateful if you can break down her scruples, make her give Kit his due, and you, with them, be happy ever after! It's such a pity to waste a day of happiness in an uncertain world! Will you ease my mind by giving me this promise, Miss Carrington?"

"Yes," said Miss Carrington, gruffly. "I had already decided that I was a fool."

"Good news!" cried Richard, springing up and seizing her hands. "Ted, will you carry out your share of this programme, bring Anne to Miss Carrington—when, Miss Carrington?"

"Now. I have a carriage waiting. Shall we go to fetch her?"

Little Anne may come. No one will see her costume in the carriage," said Miss Carrington. Ted Wilberforce hesitated. He loved Anne, was impatient for her happiness, to see her trouble go, her joy come, but—Richard? He could not bear to leave him alone while they went on this errand.

"Why not go alone, Miss Carrington? I'll stay with Latham. You go to fetch Anne yourself. Take little Anne, but I stay here. It's you and I together now, Dick, so I stay with you to-day," he said.

Richard went toward him and the two men met as Ted came forward from his easel. They put their hands on each other's shoulders, and Miss Carrington felt her eyes grow moist. This was a love that passed the love of women, and it made itself felt as these two friends stood silent for an instant, giving and taking devotion.

"All right, old Ted, stay with me," was all that Richard said.

"I'll tell Anne Dallas he is not desolate, though she must know through her cousin," thought Miss Carrington, profoundly thankful that Richard had this friend.

Little Anne had looked on this scene and listened to what had been said with intense though puzzled interest. It was clear to her that she was to go with Miss Carrington in a carriage, to see Anne, but nothing else was clear to her.

"Do I stop sitting, Mr. Wilberforce?" she asked.

"For to-day. There needs but few more sittings, little Anne. The picture will be done in four or five more, I'm sure. Then it will be exhibited in New York, and people will wonder who is Edwin Wilberforce's dark little Mystic! And only a few of us will be let into the secret that it is the smallest Anne!" Ted offered his hand to little Anne to help her down from the chair.

She seized it and kissed it.

"Doesn't God send me the dearest people!" she sighed.

Miss Carrington bore the child off with her, Ted seeing them to the carriage. He returned to Richard and to the putting away of his easel, brushes, and colours, and stood the wet canvas carefully against the wall on one of the bookcases.

Neither man was inclined to talk. This was definitely the end of Richard's short dream of joy. But he was not alone; and both men were gratefully aware of the value of their friendship now.

Joan looked up in surprise when she saw little Anne in costume; she was more surprised when Miss Carrington followed her from the carriage.

"I can't touch your glove, Miss Carrington; I've been washing bluing from every inch of the baby's surface—she had got the bottle! But please come in! I'll repeat the operation on myself. Anne is upstairs. Do you want her?" Joan asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Paul; I want her," said Miss Carrington.

Joan caught the emphasis.

"Anne, Anne," she said in a stage whisper, as she hurried into Anne's room. "Come, quick! Our aunt has capitulated; the stage is set for your entrance! She gave me the clue! Miss Carrington is downstairs!"

Anne went down trembling. Miss Carrington stood awaiting her, and came to meet her.

"Please forgive me, my dear, forgive my old attitude toward you. I think you will, later. Come home with me. I have just left your cousin. He was coming here with me, but at the last moment decided to stay with Mr. Latham. Come home with me, dear Anne, and forgive me for not yielding sooner to what I thought a mistake of Kit's. Now I want you to make him happy," she said.

"Oh, how can I? Home with you? But—that would be—does Kit know?" stammered Anne.

"It would be coming to us for good and all? Surely! I hope so! How can you? How can you not? Hasn't there been enough time wasted, enough sighs sighed and tears shed, not to delay longer? Kit does not know; it is to surprise him. Don't hesitate, Anne! You've played a noble rôle, nobly. Be big enough now to throw aside pride and accept your part. Come to Kit, my child, and forgive me."

Miss Carrington spoke eagerly; she swayed slightly, and her weakness moved Anne's pity. After all she was, as the girl had long known, a sad, impoverished old woman, whose cleverness had led nowhere, whose aims had been insignificant.

Before she could gather herself together to meet this demand upon her Anne felt little Anne's arms clinging around her waist, and looked down into the shining eyes of the child, lifted to hers above her quaint gown.

"I don't quite know what it is, Anne, dearest," little Anne whispered, "only Miss Carrington says forgive her, and we have to, or it would be a dreadful sin! You've got to forgive people, sorry ones, because you're so often a sorry one yourself—I mean all of us!"

The elder and the younger Anne smiled at each other over the head of the youngest Anne; the smile seemed to clear up the difficulty, to simplify and make natural the next step.

"You see you have the authority of the saints for it, Anne Dallas!" said Miss Carrington.

"I'll go with you, Miss Carrington," said Anne.

Kit had come in before them and had gone to his room.

Minerva followed her mistress and Anne up to Miss Carrington's sitting room; she helped Miss Carrington off with her outdoor garments, meantime scanning Anne surreptitiously and reaching a favourable verdict upon her.

"Handsomer and grander Helen Abercrombie may be, but

this sweet, good kind for me! I'm glad Master Kit has the sense!" thought Minerva.

"Better ask Mr. Christopher to come down, Minerva," said Miss Carrington when Minerva's task was done, and Miss Carrington had taken the teaspoonful of aromatic ammonia in water made necessary by the exhausting nature of her afternoon's mission.

"Go behind that curtain, my dear, if you please. We may as well set our little drama to the best of our ability, and get out of it every iota of its flavour! I want to surprise the boy."

"Oh, no; oh, no; I can't!" cried Anne.

Nevertheless, she obediently hid behind the heavy portière that hung ready to shut off draughts from the door.

Kit came in whistling softly through his teeth.

"Want me, Aunt Anne?" he asked, checking his sibilant tune.

"Yes, my dear. I wanted—wanted—to show you a—a statuette I have. It's behind the portière. Please go over and get it," said Miss Carrington, struggling to speak naturally.

Unsuspecting Kit went. He pulled the portière, but it was held. He went at it again more vigorously, and, suddenly, it swung loose, as fingers clasping it relaxed.

There, shrinking back against the wall, her face flushed, with colour that came and went, her eyes shining with joy, yet afraid, her lips tremulous and infinitely sweet, stood Anne.

"Good heavens! Anne!" cried Kit, stunned for a moment.

But only for a moment. Then he had her in his arms, lifted her off her feet, and kissed her all over the flushed, frightened, happy face.

"You little goose! Why were you so long?" he cried.

Then, as he realized what must have happened to bring her there, he turned to his aunt.

"Aunt Anne! Well, Aunt Anne! You're the greatest Anne of the three!" he cried.

Anne swiftly ran past Kit and dropped on her knees before the oldest Anne's chair, her head on Miss Carrington's lap.

"Oh, I will be good! I will repay you! Please love me!" she cried.

"Nonsense. I do!" declared the oldest Anne.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *The Fall of the Curtain*

**T**HERE are many tests of youthfulness, the mirror the least accurate.

"A man is as young as he feels," we are told, but this is misleading. A bad cold, a bill, an ill-cooked dinner, a few hours over-work, and the youthful man of the morning may feel decrepit by night. Thoreau hits it more nearly when he makes the thrill with which spring is hailed the test of age; we are not old, he tells us, if the blood in our veins runs swifter with the mounting sap; if we echo the joyousness of the bluebird's annunciatory warble.

Akin to this under urban conditions is the expectant thrill with which we await the curtain's rise upon the drama. Both are anticipatory; both mean youth's impatience for the play. Each summer is heralded by vague anticipation of delight; each play which we wait to see for the first time hints of unknown pleasures. No one is jaded, no one really old, who is eager for a new joy.

By this test there was a youthful audience gathered in the Stratford Theatre on a night of late November. Great things were said to be in store for that audience. This was the first night of the first play by Richard Latham, the poet.

Those who had ways of knowing something of the play said that it was "great!" Those who had no clue to what they were to see said that Richard Latham never allowed anything to go forth over his name that was unworthy of his growing fame.

Obviously, when it was not a matter of a poem in a magazine, but a play on the boards, he would be no less exacting with himself. Consequently, there was a literary and dramatic treat awaiting these first nighters.

The orchestra was playing a Schumann overture to which it was competent; the Stratford, under a renowned management, was deficient in no department. In the stage box on the right sat ex-Governor Abercrombie; with him his magnificently handsome daughter in a golden gown and brilliant jewels; her husband-elect, his battered good looks still striking, and a dark young woman in white who made an excellent foil for the golden Helen, and who might have been George Lanbury's sister.

Miss Carrington was in the next box, decidedly the elegant old-type gentlewoman in shining silvery silk, point lace, and a few fine diamonds. With her was her nephew, Christopher Carrington, tall and straight, his face youthfully clear, radiating happiness.

A girl as sweet as a flower in pale, rose-coloured *crêpe*, shrank somewhat into the shadow of Miss Carrington's shoulder. It was hard for Anne to feel that Richard would not see her and lose something from his hour of triumph. But though Richard knew precisely where Anne sat, and had made Ted Wilberforce describe to him what she wore and how she looked, it did not disturb him. He always wanted Anne, never forgot that he was denied her; this was the established condition of his days; to-night the play must be the thing.

In the box next to the author's were Mr. and Mrs. Berkley, Joan and Antony, with Peter back of them, ready to stand if his view were impeded, striving to act as though he had spent years going to first nights in theatre boxes, devoutly hoping that his unaccustomedness to plays was not perceptible to the eyes of the audience, which he imagined were upon him. Joan alone

had a divided mind. She had been persuaded to leave her baby with Bibiana. Bibiana had been a devoted nurse to little Anne, but when it came to a baby like Barbara, provided you ever could come to a baby like Barbara, the risk of leaving her was too great to get it out of mind. Joan eagerly waited for the curtain to go up, but at the same time she was wondering if the nursery window was down.

The author's box was the stage box on the left. The audience swayed in an effort to see Latham better, but Richard sat in the shadow of the drapery, additionally screened by a tall man whom those versed in the affairs of the town recognized as Edwin Wilberforce, the painter, Richard Latham's devoted friend.

In the front of the author's box, leaning absorbed over its edge, utterly unconscious that people noticed her and speculated on whom she was, why she was chosen to be with Latham on this first presentation of his play, sat a little girl. She was dark, thin, not precisely pretty, but there was a ceaseless play of expression upon her eager little face that placed her beyond mere childish prettiness. She was dressed in filmy white material that threatened to be destroyed by her rapid motions. There were many in the audience who had seen the exhibition of American painters in the last week of October and the first week of November, who recognized this child as the original of "The Mystic," Wilberforce's picture, the finest picture of the exhibition, the one most discussed, oftenest printed in sepia-tinted Sunday supplements.

Little Anne turned at last from her absorbed yet horrified contemplation of shoulder blades and spines in the parquette below, the elevation of the box giving her ample opportunity for her study of anatomy and ethics. She looked up at Ted Wilberforce with shocked eyes and spoke to him with bated breath; Mr. Latham was lucky to be blind, after all, she felt.

"Do you s'pose, do you really, truly s'pose, they *all* thought there wouldn't be anybody here but just themselves?" little Anne asked.

"Poor little Anne!" exclaimed Ted Wilberforce.

He pitied the child's pang at her first clash with the world in which at least one of the inimical triumvirate runs at large. "It's the custom just now, dear; they don't see it as we do—in a two-fold sense!"

"I'm going to say a prayer for 'em. It's awful!" groaned little Anne with a shudder.

Then she proved that everywhere she behaved as the same little Anne, by closing her eyes, clasping her hands, and moving her lips fast, seated in the front of the stage box.

Having thrown the responsibility of rescuing these unfortunates, who were perfectly self-satisfied, upon their Maker, little Anne turned with zest to the stage.

The curtain was slowly rising upon a peaceful river, flowing between its banks under a marvellous effect of sunrise. The scene struck little Anne as familiar.

"It looks just like Cleavedge river, only I'm never out at sunrise," she said.

"Mr. Wilberforce made the sketch; it is our river, Anne," said Richard.

He forgot his misfortune and leaned forward as if he might see the heroine's entrance. She emerged from the rosy mists that enveloped her, a beautiful, effective entrance for the character that was to embody youth, purity, and self-forgetful love.

The audience applauded, but was quickly silent, for the girl was speaking the lovely opening lines which embodied the aim of the play. From this moment there was complete quiet over the house, the absence of those fidgeting movements which reveal a lack of interest; the silence was far higher praise than applause

could be. Yet applause followed on the first curtain fall, calling it up again and yet again, and cries of "Author!" began to arise here and there, though the time for them had not come.

Visiting set in when the plaudits ceased. People streamed out into the lobby, men came and hung over the orchestra chairs in which sat the ladies who had so afflicted little Anne.

Richard Latham's box was besieged by acquaintances and newspaper men in search of first-hand information as to how he had come to write "The Guerdon," what his idea was in producing a play so unlike the usual thing, what he should write next, and all the other big-little facts demanded by the public, which rightly sees biography as supremely important.

Ted Wilberforce had carried little Anne out to walk in the lobby, lifting her over the crowd.

"I'm afraid," she said, seriously, as he set her down, "that people will not know that I was eight last month. It makes you look even less'n seven to be carried. But I thank you just the same, Mr. Wilberforce, and it's nice to walk the kinks out, and a box is quite warm, though, of course, it sounds so."

The curtain rose on the second act with everyone back in his seat. That alone proved how the play was taking.

This act closed on a peculiarly silent house. There were handkerchiefs fluttering against eyes which were not accustomed to moisten over sentiment so simple, so denuded of all but a direct appeal to the finest human ideals. "The Guerdon" voiced this appeal without much supplementary stage craft. The acting was perfect. This time with calls for the author came calls for the three principal actors.

"Oh, if I could see them! They speak the lines as if they were inspired!" sighed Richard, permitting himself to bemoan his blindness. But he did not respond to the calls for a speech from him.

"The third act is the test; I'll try to say something after it, if

it pleases them," Richard told the delighted manager who made his impeded way into the poet's box.

When the curtain fell on the third act, after a moment's hush the applause was tempestuous, and this time there was no resisting the enthusiastic shouts of "Author! Speech! Author!"

Richard had not intended to resist his audience if it wanted him to talk after this act. He arose and patted little Anne's shoulder in farewell.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm going on the stage, little Anne, and it might be as well to pray for me to say the right thing as to pray for the ladies of the shoulder blades," said Richard, smiling.

Little Anne at once closed her eyes, and obeyed him literally.

Richard came forth from the side of the curtain, the same calm, gentle Richard that little Anne knew at home, and she heard Ted Wilberforce draw in his breath sharply.

Richard stood bowing from left to right for a few minutes while the audience frantically welcomed him. The pathos of his blindness had never been more poignant.

Then silence fell, the impressive silence of a concourse of people.

"My friends," Richard's quiet, thrilling voice broke the silence, "it is not custom that makes me call you my friends. It seems to me that in your reception of my play there is a quality that means friendship for the man that wrote it. Or is it that I like to think so? I am deeply grateful to you. Having said that, I might stop talking, for what can I add? Truly, indeed, I thank you! The first night of his first play means a great deal to an author. It means pretty much what it must have meant to Wendy, John, and little Michael to be taken by Peter Pan into the Never Never Land. It means one's dreams come true.

"For three years I carried 'The Guerdon' around with me in vague, mist-encircled thoughts of it, a waking dream. Gradually

the characters in it emerged farther and farther out of the mist, taking shape as the events of that period of their lives with which the play deals evolved and developed them. I knew what happened to these people because I knew the people, and, again, I knew the people because of what happened to them.

"Perhaps we do not realize how much of us the events of our lives reveal. There are certain things that cannot befall people of a certain type, and the reverse is equally true: there are events almost sure to befall a certain type of people. The law of attraction, it seems to me, holds in all combinations, in all orders of creation. Circumstances develop from within outward. Though we are acted upon extraneously it is because we call forth and yield ourselves to the action.

"Thus I came to know the people in this play through what happened to them, and I understood what they must be to receive the particular guerdon that you are seeing come to them. Nor has it seemed to me that I caused these events of the play, nor created the people. It is an unending marvel to us who write how wilful our puppets become, how we stand aside and watch them make or mar their lives in spite of us, precisely as do our other friends who are clothed in flesh. I have had help in writing this play for which I shall be grateful all my life. It grew in a quiet room in Cleavedge, and its writing was a never-to-be-forgotten joy; a present joy that abides is mine, though the play is done. Whatever comes to me later, I can never write another first play, nor lose the happiness this one brought to me, crowned to-night by your great kindness to it.

"You have shown me that I have not quite failed to share the dream with you. You approve 'The Guerdon.' With all my heart I thank you. That is my guerdon. I am a happy man to-night. I am grateful to the men and women who have embodied the people in the play as I knew them, but as you could

not know them but for this acting, since outside my brain and that quiet room in Cleavedge these play-people had never ventured. Out of a grateful heart I thank you all."

Anne shrank farther back as she listened to Richard talking here as simply, as quietly as he had talked to her in that quiet room. His allusion to it brought it before her so vividly that the theatre, the audience were blotted out. She was back in that room, the bees humming in the beautiful garden, their hum and the scent of the flowers they were rifling coming in through the windows, open to the light breeze. She knew that Richard was speaking to *her*, telling *her* not to grieve, to remember that he was sincerely glad to carry with him the memory of the days that had left him only memory. Kit, seeing Anne's face, came forward to take her chair and give her his place, a little back of his aunt.

"Don't look like that, honey!" he whispered. "People will notice, and hang and quarter me! There's always someone about who knows too much! I don't care if Latham did write 'The Guerdon!' 'But notta Carlotta! I gotta Carlotta!' However you pity him, you can't marry us both, dear! Latham is happy! That's true. Look at him!"

Richard was acknowledging the applause of his modest speech; his smile was bright, his face shining. Ted Wilberforce was clapping with all his might over little Anne's head, and little Anne was waving both arms over the rail of the box, leaning out of it dangerously, and shouting shrilly:

"You dear, you dear, you dear!" to the delight of everyone within range of her clear, childish voice.

Miss Carrington fell back in her chair after her emphatic applause of Richard. She looked at Kit proudly, amusement and satisfaction in her eyes.

"Fancy being the power behind the throne, the victorious rival in a scene like this, Master Kit! I've always thought.

you a nice lad, Christopher, but I never expected to see you before the public, which does not suspect your glory, the scorner of such a creature as yonder splendid Helen; the victor over the winner of the laurels which muses and men bestow! Is it possible that I ever bought you copper-toed boots, and ordered mutton tallow on your properly scornful nose!" she said.

The fourth act followed, a worthy climax to the play, and when the final curtain was rung down on "The Guerdon" Richard's triumph was complete. His box was full of flowers, masses of roses and orchids bearing bits of cardboard, each with a well-known name engraved on it.

"Too bad this isn't a church!" observed little Anne, to whom flowers and altars were synonymous.

"I'll send them all to the nearest church in your name, little Anne!" declared Richard. "Now you and Ted come with me to the manager's room. I'm going to bid you good-bye there. Kit and Miss Dallas are coming. They will not come to my supper of celebration, and you're too small to sup with me. So we'll part, to meet again in Cleavedge in the spring."

"Oh, me!" sighed little Anne. "Nothing keeps right on. Heaven is best. I don't want you to go!"

Richard and Ted Wilberforce, with little Anne, went to the manager's room.

Anne and Kit were waiting there.

Richard took Kit's outstretched hand in both of his and held it. They talked earnestly for a few minutes, while Ted talked to his cousin. Anne was nervously fighting back her tears and Ted was evidently reassuring her.

Richard turned from Kit and crossed over to her.

"We are the only ones who know how much of 'The Guerdon' is yours, patient little collaborator!" he said. "I shall not see you till spring. Ted and I have decided upon Rome in February. Then Cleavedge for us both! Will you make a room for me in

the new home which you're to begin at Easter? Kit says 'Yes! Will Kit's wife also welcome me?'"

"Oh, dear Richard, who so beloved or so welcome?" Anne cried.

"Good-bye, then, for a time. I am content. What a night! And how much of it due to you! I'm a lucky poet! Good-bye, dearest of women." Richard took Anne's hand, held it for a moment, then relinquished it, laying it down amid the folds of her skirt with a tiny smile. But his lips had grown white, and the movement was like laying down a dead, not a living hand. The three adults watching him knew that he then bade farewell forever to Anne Dallas, whom he should always love.

Then he turned to little Anne.

"And good-bye to you, little Anne, darling, but only for a half year!" he said.

He stooped to kiss her, but little Anne threw her arms around him with such a tempestuous embrace that he raised her, clinging to his neck, to his breast.

"If only nothing ever changed!" she sobbed.

"What shall I bring you from Rome, dear child? I'll be back when May comes to Cleavedge."

Little Anne traced a tiny cross on his forehead with her thumb-nail.

"Only you. Take care of yourself and bring me you," she said. "I shall study hard's I can to be ready to help you when you come home. I'm going to learn to write on a typewriter and make squiggles so you can tell me your works like Anne! But if you have time I'd just love to have you pray for me in the catacombs!"

"How I wish I could take you with me! It would be worth anything to show you St. Peter's, little Anne!" said Richard.

"Oh, yes!" little Anne breathlessly agreed.

Then she added, with one of her exalted moods suddenly

sweeping her beyond the grief of parting and the desire for Rome:

"But every place is the same, if you've got God!"

"What a valedictory to a theatrical triumph!" exclaimed Richard.

Annie and Kit took little Anne's cold hands and went away. Ted Wilberforce followed them down the corridor to say good-bye to the child and a last word to his cousin.

"Good-bye, little Anne! Remember to love me with Richard. And go to sleep in a trice, for this is dissipation, you know!" said Ted.

Little Anne warmly returned his farewell kiss.

"I've had a wonderful time, and I don't truly think I could go to sleep," she said. "I'd just as lief as not sit up hours and hours to talk about it to Mother and Father and Joan and Peter and everyone! It's rather wasteful to go to bed when you feel wide awake, 'way through, don't you think so? But good-bye, dear Mr. Wilberforce. I do love you, too!"

Ted returned to Richard to go with him to the supper that he was giving to celebrate "The Guerdon." Anne and Kit took little Anne with them to the hotel where they all were to spend the night, and return to Cleavedge in the morning.

"It's all over!" said Anne.

"It's all beginning, little wife!" Kit corrected her.

"Isn't something always like that, all over and just beginning?" asked wise little Anne.

THE END

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